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A PRINCESS OF THULE.

MACMILLAN & CO.
LONDON

A PRINCESS OF THULE.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON," &c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A PRINCESS OF THULE.

CHAPTER I.

FAIRY-LAND.

"WELCOME to London——!"

He was about to add "Sheila," but suddenly stopped. The girl, who had hastily come forward to meet him, with a glad look in her eyes, and with both hands outstretched, doubtless perceived the brief embarrassment of the moment, and was perhaps a little amused by it. But she took no notice of it; she merely advanced to him, and caught both his hands, and said—

"And are you very well?"

It was the old and familiar salutation, uttered in the same odd, gentle, insinuating fashion, and in the same low and sweet voice. Sheila's stay in Oban, and the few days she had already spent

in London, had not taught her the difference between "very" and "ferry."

"It is so strange to hear you speak in London——, Mrs. Lavender," he said, with rather a wry face as he pronounced her full and proper title.

And now it was Sheila's turn to look a bit embarrassed, and colour, and appear uncertain whether to be vexed or pleased, when her husband himself broke in with his usual good-natured impetuosity.

"I say, Ingram, don't be absurd. Of course you must call her Sheila—unless when there are people here, and then you may please yourself. Why, the poor girl has enough of strange things and names about her already. I don't know how she keeps her head. It would bewilder me, I know; but I can see that, after she has stood at the window for a time, and begun to get dazed by all the wonderful sights and sounds outside, she suddenly withdraws and fixes all her attention on some little domestic duty, just as if she were hanging on to the practical things of life to assure herself it isn't all a dream. Isn't that so, Sheila?" he said, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"You ought not to watch me like that," she said, with a smile. "But it is the noise that is

most bewildering. There are many places I will know already when I see them, many places and things I have known in pictures; but now the size of them, and the noise of carriages, and the people always passing—and always different—always strangers, so that you never see the same people any more——. But I am getting very much accustomed to it."

"You are trying very hard to get accustomed to it, any way, my good girl," said her husband.

"You need not be in a hurry; you may begin to regret some day that you have not a little of that feeling of wonder left," said Ingram. "But you have not told me anything of what you think about London, and of how you like it, and how you like your house, and what you have done with Bras, and a thousand other things——"

"I will tell you all that directly, when I have got for you some wine and some biscuits."

"Sheila, you can ring for them," said her husband; but she had by that time departed on her mission. Presently she returned, and waited upon Ingram just as if she had been in her father's house in Borva, with the gentlemen in a hurry to go out to the fishing, and herself the only one who could serve them.

She put a small table close by the French

window; she drew back the curtains as far as they would go to show the sunshine of a bright forenoon in May lighting up the trees in the square and gleaming on the pale and tall fronts of the houses beyond; and she wheeled in three low easy-chairs so as to front this comparatively cheerful prospect. Somehow or other it seemed quite natural that Sheila should wheel in those chairs. It was certainly no disrespect on the part of either her husband or her visitor which caused both of them to sit still and give her her own way about such things. Indeed, Lavender had not as yet ever attempted to impress upon Sheila the necessity of cultivating the art of helplessness. That, with other social graces, would perhaps come in good time. She would soon acquire the habits and ways of her friends and acquaintances, without his trying to force upon her a series of affectations, which would only embarrass her and cloud the perfect frankness and spontaneity of her nature. Of one thing he was quite assured—that, whatever mistakes Sheila might make in society, they would never render her ridiculous. Strangers might not know the absolute sincerity of her every word and act, which gave her a courage that had no fear of criticism, but they could at least see the simple grace and dignity of the girl, and

that natural ease of manner which is mainly the result of a thorough consciousness of honesty. To burden her with rules and regulations of conduct, would be to produce the very catastrophes he wished to avoid. Where no attempt is made, failure is impossible; and he was meanwhile well content that Sheila should simply appear as Sheila, even although she might draw in a chair for a guest, or so far forget her dignity as to pour out some wine for her husband.

"After all, Sheila," said Lavender, "hadn't I better begin and tell Ingram about your surprise and delight when you came near Oban, and saw the tall hotels, and the trees? It was the trees, I think, that struck you most; because, you know, those in Lewis—well, to tell the truth—the fact is, the trees of Lewis are not just—they cannot be said to be——"

"You bad boy, to say anything against the Lewis!" exclaimed Sheila: and Ingram held that she was right; and that there were certain sorts of ingratitude more disgraceful than others, and that this was just about the worst.

"Oh, I have brought all the good away from Lewis," said Lavender, with a careless impertinence.

"No," said Sheila, proudly. "You have not brought away my papa; and there is not any-

one in this country I have seen as good as he is."

"My dear, your experience of the thirty millions of folks in these islands is quite convincing. I was wholly in the wrong; and if you forgive me, we shall celebrate our reconciliation in a cigarette—that is to say, Ingram and I will perform the rites, and you can look on."

So Sheila went away to get the cigarettes also.

"You don't say you smoke in your drawing-room, Lavender?" said Ingram, mindful of the fastidious ways of his friend even when he had bachelor's rooms in King Street.

"Don't I, though? I smoke everywhere—all over the place. Don't you see, we have no visitors yet. No one is supposed to know we have come South. Sheila must get all sorts of things before she can be introduced to my friends and my aunt's friends, and the house must be put to rights, too. You wouldn't have her go to see my aunt in that sailor's costume she used to rush about in up in Lewis?"

"That is precisely what I would have," said Ingram; "she cannot look more handsome in any other dress."

"Why, my aunt would fancy I had married a savage—I believe she fears something of the sort now."

"And you haven't told even her that you are in London?"

"No."

"Well, Lavender, that is a precious silly performance. Suppose she hears of your being in town, what will you say to her?"

"I should tell her I wanted a few days to get my wife properly dressed before taking her about."

Ingram shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you are right. Perhaps, indeed, it would be better if you waited six months before you introduced Sheila to your friends. At present you seem to be keeping the footlights turned down, until everything is ready for the first scene, and then Sheila is to burst upon society in a blaze of light and colour. Well, that is harmless enough; but look here. You don't know much about her yet—you will be naturally anxious to hear what the audience, as it were, say of her—and there is just a chance of your unconsciously adopting their impressions and opinions of Sheila, seeing that you have no very fixed ones of your own. Now what your social circle may think about her is a difficult thing to decide; and I confess I would rather have seen you remain six months in Lewis before bringing her up here."

Ingram was at least a candid friend. It was not the first, nor the hundredth time, that Frank Lavender had to endure small lectures, uttered in a slow, deliberate voice, and yet with an indifference of manner which showed that Ingram cared very little how sharply his words struck home. He rarely even apologized for his bluntness. These were his opinions; Lavender could take them or leave them as he liked. And the younger man, after finding his face flush a bit on being accused of wishing to make a dramatic impression with Sheila's entrance into London society, laughed in an embarrassed way, and said—

"It is impossible to be angry with you, Ingram, and yet you do talk so absurdly. I wonder who is likely to know more about the character of a girl than her own husband!"

"You may in time; you don't now," said Ingram, carefully balancing a biscuit on the point of his finger.

"The fact is," said Lavender, with good-natured impatience, "you are the most romantic card I know, and there is no pleasing you. You have all sorts of exalted notions about things—about sentiments, and duties, and so forth. Well, all that is true enough, and would be right enough, if the world were filled with men

and women like yourself: but then it isn't, you see; and one has to give in to conventionalities of dress, and living, and ceremonies, if one wants to retain one's friends. Now, I like to see you going about with that wide-awake—it suits your brown complexion and beard—and that stick that would do for herding sheep; and the costume looks well, and is business-like and excellent when you're off for a walk over the Surrey downs or lying on the river-banks about Henley or Cookham; but it isn't, you know, the sort of costume for a stroll in the Park——"

"Whenever God withdraws from me my small share of common sense," said Ingram, slowly, "so far that I shall begin to think of having my clothes made for the purpose of walking in Hyde Park—well——"

"But don't you see," said Lavender, "that one must meet one's friends, especially when one is married; and when you know that at a certain hour in the forenoon they are all to be found in a particular place, and that a very pleasant place—and that you will do yourself good by having a walk in the fresh air, and so forth—I really don't see anything very immoral in going down for an hour or so to the Park."

"Don't you think the pleasure of seeing one's

friends might be postponed till one had done some sort of a good day's work?" said Ingram, mindful of the goodly promise of the youth, and knowing well that Sheila expected the husband of her choice to make a great name for himself one of these days.

"There now," cried Lavender, "that is another of your delusions. You are always against superstitions, and yet you make work a fetish. You do with work just as women do with duty—they carry about with them a convenient little god, and they are always worshipping it with small sacrifices, and complimenting themselves on a series of little martyrdoms that are of no good to anybody, Of course, duty wouldn't be duty if it wasn't disagreeable, and when they go nursing the sick—and they could get it better done for fifteen shillings a week by somebody else—they don't mind coming back to their families with the seeds of typhus about their gowns; and when they crush the affections in order to worship at the shrine of duty, they don't consider that they may be making martyrs of other folks who don't want martyrdom, and get no sort of pleasure out of it. Now, what in all the world is the good of work as work? I believe myself that work is an unmistakeable evil, involving all sorts of jealousy, and greed,

and envy; but when it is a necessity, I suppose you get some sort of selfish satisfaction in overcoming it; and doubtless if there was any immediate necessity in my case—I don't deny the necessity may arise, and that I should like nothing better than to work for Sheila's sake——"

"Now you are coming to the point," said Ingram, who had been listening with his usual patience to his friend's somewhat chaotic speculations. "Perhaps you may have to work for your wife's sake and your own; and I confess I am surprised to see you so content with your present circumstances. If your aunt's property legally reverted to you—if you had any sort of family claim on it—that would make some little difference; but you know that any sudden quarrel between you might leave you penniless to-morrow——"

"In which case I should begin to work to-morrow; and I should come to you for my first commission."

"And you shouldn't have it. I would have you to go and fight the world for yourself—without which a man knows nothing of himself or of his relations with those around him——"

"Frank, dear, here are the cigarettes," said Sheila, at this point; and as she came and sat down, the discussion ceased.

For Sheila began to tell her friend of all the strange adventures that had befallen her since she left the far island of Lewis—how she had seen with fear the great mountains of Skye lit up by the wild glare of a stormy sunrise; how she had beheld with astonishment the great fir-woods of Armadale; and how green and beautiful were the shores of the Sound of Mull. And then, Oban!—with its shining houses, its blue bay, and its magnificent trees all lit up by a fair and still sunshine. She had not imagined there was anywhere in the world so beautiful a place; and could scarcely believe that London itself was more rich and noble, and impressive. For there were beautiful ladies walking along the broad pavements, and there were shops with large windows that seemed to contain everything that the mind could desire, and there was a whole fleet of yachts in the bay. But it was the trees, above all, that captivated her; and she asked if they were lords who owned those beautiful houses built up on the hill and half-smothered among lilacs, and ash-trees, and rowan-trees, and ivy.

"My darling," Lavender had said to her, "if your papa were to come and live here, he could buy half-a-dozen of those cottages, gardens and all. They are mostly the property of well-to-do shopkeepers. If this little place takes your

fancy, what will you say when you go South—when you see Wimbledon, and Richmond, and Kew, with their grand old commons and trees? Why, you could hide Oban in a corner of Richmond Park!"

"And my papa has seen all those places?"

"Yes. Don't you think it strange he should have seen them all, and known he could live in any of them, and then gone away back to Borva?"

"But what would the poor people have done if he had never gone back?"

"Oh, some one else would have taken his place."

"And then, if he were living here, or in London, he might have got tired, and he might have wished to go back to the Lewis and see all the people he knew; and then he would come among them like a stranger, and have no house to go to."

Then Lavender said, quite gently—

"Do you think, Sheila, you will ever tire of living in the South?"

The girl looked up quickly, and said, with a sort of surprised questioning in her eyes—

"No, not with you. But then we shall often go to the Lewis?"

"Oh, yes," her husband said, "as often as we can conveniently. But it will take some time at

first, you know, before you get to know all my friends who are to be your friends, and before you get properly fitted into your social circle. That will take you a long time, Sheila, and you may have many annoyances or embarrassments to encounter; but you won't be very much afraid, my girl?"

Sheila merely looked up to him; there was no fear in the frank, brave eyes.

The first large town she saw struck a cold chill to her heart. On a wet and dismal afternoon they sailed into Greenock. A heavy smoke hung about the black building-yards and the dirty quays; the narrow and squalid streets were filled with mud, and only the poorer sections of the population waded through the mire or hung disconsolately about the corners of the thoroughfares. A gloomier picture could not well be conceived; and Sheila, chilled with the long and wet sail, and bewildered by the noise and bustle of the harbour, was driven to the hotel with a sore heart and a downcast face.

"This is not like London, Frank," she said, pretty nearly ready to cry with disappointment.

"This? No. Well, it is like a part of London, certainly, but not the part you will live in."

"But how can we live in the one place with-

out passing the other and being made miserable by it? There was no part of Oban like this."

"Why, you will live miles away from the docks and quays of London. You might live for a lifetime in London without ever knowing it had a harbour. Don't you be afraid, Sheila. You will live in a district where there are far finer houses than any you saw in Oban, and far finer trees; and within a few minutes' walk you will find great gardens and parks, with lakes in them and wild fowl, and you will be able to teach the boys about how to set the helm and the sails when they are launching their small boats."

"I should like that," said Sheila, with her face brightening.

"Perhaps you would like a boat yourself?"

"Yes," she said, frankly. "If there were not many people there, we might go out sometimes in the evening——"

Her husband laughed, and took her hand.

"You don't understand, Sheila. The boats the boys have are little things a foot or two long —like the one in your papa's bedroom in Borva. But many of the boys would be greatly obliged to you if you would teach them how to manage the sails properly; for sometimes dreadful shipwrecks occur."

"You must bring them to our house; I am

very fond of little boys—when they begin to forget to be shy, and let you become acquainted with them."

"Well," said Lavender, "I don't know many of the boys who sail boats in the Serpentine; you will have to make their acquaintance yourself. But I know one boy whom I must bring to the house. He is a German-Jew boy, who is going to be another Mendelssohn, his friends say. He is a pretty boy, with ruddy, brown hair, big black eyes, and a fine forehead; and he really sings and plays delightfully. But you know, Sheila, you must not treat him as a boy, for he is over fifteen, I should think; and if you were to kiss him——"

"He might be angry," said Sheila, with perfect simplicity.

"I might," said Lavender; and then, noticing that she seemed a little surprised, he merely patted her head and bade her go and get ready for dinner.

Then came the great climax of Sheila's southward journey—her arrival in London. She was all anxiety to see her future home; and as her luck would have it, there was a fair Spring morning shining over the city. For a couple of hours before she had sat and looked out of the carriage-window as the train whirled rapidly through the

scarcely-awakened country ; and she had seen the soft and beautiful landscapes of the South lit up by the early sunlight. How the bright little villages shone, with here and there a gilt weathercock glittering on the spire of some small grey church ; while as yet in many valleys a pale grey mist lay along the bed of the level streams or clung to the dense woods on the upland heights. Which was the more beautiful—the sharp, clear picture, with its brilliant colours and its awakening life, or the more mystic landscape over which was still drawn the tender veil of even the morning haze? She could not tell. She only knew that England, as she then saw it, seemed a great country that was very beautiful, that had few inhabitants, and that was still, and sleepy, and bathed in sunshine. How happy must the people be in those quiet green valleys, by the side of slow and smooth rivers, and mid great woods and avenues of stately trees, the like of which she had not imagined even in her dreams!

But from the moment that they got out at Euston Square, she seemed a trifle bewildered, and could only do implicitly as her husband bade her—clinging to his hand, for the most part, as if to make sure of guidance. She did, indeed, glance somewhat nervously at the hansom into which Lavender put her, apparently asking how

such a tall and narrow two-wheeled vehicle could be prevented toppling over. But when he, having sent on all their luggage by a respectable old four-wheeler, got into the hansom beside her, and put his hand inside her arm, and bade her be of good cheer that she should have such a pleasant morning to welcome her to London, she said "Yes," mechanically, and only looked out in a wistful fashion at the great houses and trees of Euston Square, the mighty and roaring stream of omnibuses, the droves of strangers mostly clad in black, as if they were going to church, and the pale blue smoke that seemed to mix with the sunshine and make it cold and distant.

They were in no hurry, these two, on that still morning, and so, to impress Sheila all at once with a sense of the greatness and grandeur of London, he made the cabman cut down by Park Crescent and Portland Place to Regent Circus. They then went along Oxford Street; and there were crowded omnibuses taking young men into the City; while all the pavements were busy with hurrying passers-by. What multitudes of unknown faces—unknown to her and unknown to each other! These people did not speak—they only hurried on, each intent upon his own affairs, caring nothing, apparently, for the din around them, and looking so strange

and sad in their black clothes, in the pale and misty sunlight.

"You are in a trance, Sheila," he said.

She did not answer. Surely she had wandered into some magical city; for now the houses on one side of the way suddenly ceased, and she saw before her a great and undulating extent of green, with a border of beautiful flowers, and with groups of trees that met the sky all along the southern horizon. Did the green and beautiful country she had seen shoot in thus into the heart of the town, or was there another city far away on the other side of the trees? The place was almost as deserted as those still valleys she had passed by in the morning. Here, in the street, there was the roar of a passing crowd; but over there was a long and almost deserted stretch of Park, with winding roads and umbrageous trees, on which the wan sunlight fell from between loose masses of half-golden cloud.

Then they passed Kensington Gardens; and there were more people walking down the broad highways between the elms.

"You are getting nearly home now, Sheila," he said. "And you will be able to come and walk in these avenues whenever you please."

Was this, then, her home?—this section of a barrack-row of dwellings, all alike in steps,

pillars, doors, and windows? When she got inside, the servant who had opened the door bobbed a curtsey to her: should she shake hands with her, and say, "And are you ferry well?" But at this moment Lavender came running up the steps, playfully hurried her into the house and up the stairs, and led her into her own drawing-room.

"Well, my girl, what do think of your home, now that you see it?"

Sheila looked round, timidly. It was not a big room; but it was a palace in height, and grandeur, and colour, compared with that little museum in Borva in which Sheila's piano stood. It was all so strange and beautiful—the split pomegranates and quaint leaves on the upper part of the walls, and underneath a dull slate colour where the pictures hung—the curious painting on the frames of the mirrors—the brilliant curtains, with their stiff and formal patterns. It was not very much like a home as yet—it was more like a picture that had been carefully planned and executed; but she knew how he had thought of pleasing her in choosing these things, and, without saying a word, she took his hand and kissed it. And then she went to one of the three tall French windows, and looked out on the square. There, between the

trees, was a space of beautiful soft green; and some children, dressed in bright dresses, and attended by a governess in sober black, had just begun to play croquet. An elderly lady, with a small white dog, was walking along one of the gravelled paths. An old man was pruning some bushes.

"It is very still and quiet here," said Sheila. "I was afraid we should have to live in that terrible noise always."

"I hope you won't find it dull, my darling," he said.

"Dull, when you are here?"

"But I cannot always be here, you know?"

She looked up.

"You see, a man is so much in the way if he is dawdling about a house all day long. You would begin to regard me as a nuisance, Sheila; and would be for sending me out to play croquet with those young Broughtons merely that you might get the rooms dusted. Besides you know I couldn't work here—I must have a studio of some sort in the neighbourhood, of course. And then you will give me your orders in the morning as to when I am to come round for luncheon or dinner."

"And you will be alone all day at your work?"

"Yes."

"Then I will come and sit with you, my poor boy," she said.

"Much work I should do in that case!" he said. "But we'll see. In the meantime go upstairs and get your things off; that young person below has breakfast ready, I daresay."

"But you have not shown me yet where Mr. Ingram lives," said Sheila, before she went to the door.

"Oh, that is miles away. You have only seen a little bit of London yet. Ingram lives about as far away from here as the distance you have just come, but in another direction."

"It is like a world made of houses," said Sheila, "and all filled with strangers. But you will take me to see Mr. Ingram?"

"By and by, yes. But he is sure to drop in on you as soon as he fancies you are settled in your new home."

And here, at last, was Mr. Ingram come; and the mere sound of his voice seemed to carry her back to Borva, so that, in talking to him and waiting on him as of old, she would scarcely have been surprised if her father had walked in to say that a coaster was making for the harbour, or that Duncan was going over to Stornoway, and Sheila should have to give him commissions. Her hus-

band did not take the same interest in the social and political affairs of Borva that Mr. Ingram did. Lavender had made a pretence of assisting Sheila in her work among the poor people; but the effort was a hopeless failure. He could not remember the name of the family that wanted a new boat, and was visibly impatient when Sheila would sit down to write out, for some aged crone, a letter to her grandson in Canada. Now Ingram, for the mere sake of occupation, had qualified himself during his various visits to Lewis so that he might have become the Home Minister of the King of Borva; and Sheila was glad to have one attentive listener as she described all the wonderful things that had happened in the island since the previous summer.

But Ingram had got a full and complete holiday on which to come up and see Sheila; and he had brought with him the wild and startling proposal that, in order that she should take her first plunge into the pleasures of civilized life, her husband and herself should drive down to Richmond and dine at the Star and Garter.

"What is that?" said Sheila.

"My dear girl," said her husband, seriously, "your ignorance is something fearful to contemplate. It is quite bewildering. How can a person who does not know what the Star and

Garter is, be told what the Star and Garter is?"

"But I am willing to go and see," said Sheila.

"Then I must look after getting a brougham," said Lavender, rising.

"A brougham on such a day as this?" exclaimed Ingram. "Nonsense! get an open trap of some sort—and Sheila, just to please me, will put on that very blue dress she used to wear in Borva, and the hat and the white feather, if she has got it——"

"Perhaps you would like me to put on a sealskin cap and a red handkerchief instead of a collar," observed Lavender, calmly.

"You may do as you please. Sheila and I are going to dine at the Star and Garter."

"May I put on that blue dress?" said the girl, going up to her husband.

"Yes, of course, if you like," said Lavender, meekly, going off to order the carriage, and wondering by what route he could drive those two maniacs down to Richmond so that none of his friends should see them.

When he came back again, bringing with him a landau which could be shut up for the homeward journey at night, he had to confess that no costume seemed to suite Sheila so well as the

rough sailor-dress; and he was so pleased with her appearance, that he consented at once to let Bras go with them in the carriage, on condition that Sheila should be responsible for him. Indeed, after the first shiver of driving away from the Square was over, he forgot that there was much unusual about the look of this odd pleasure-party. If you had told him, eighteen months before, that on a bright day in May, just as people were going home from the Park for luncheon, he would go for a drive in a hired trap with one horse, his companions being a man with a brown wide-awake, a girl dressed as though she were the owner of a yacht, and an immense deer-hound, and that in this fashion, he would dare to drive up to the Star and Garter and order dinner, he would have bet five hundred to one that such a thing would never occur so long as he preserved his senses. But somehow he did not mind much. He was very much at home with those two people beside him; the day was bright and fresh; the horse went a good pace; and once they were over Hammersmith Bridge and out among fields and trees, the country looked exceedingly pretty, and all the beauty of it was mirrored in Sheila's eyes.

"I can't quite make you out in that dress, Sheila," he said. "I am not sure whether

it is real and business-like, or a theatrical costume. I have seen girls on Ryde Pier with something of the same sort on, only a good deal more pronounced, you know—and they looked like sham yachtsmen; and I have seen stewardesses wearing that colour and texture of cloth——"

"But why not leave it as it is," said Ingram, "a solitary costume produced by certain conditions of climate and duties, acting in conjunction with a natural taste for harmonious colouring and simple form? That dress, I will maintain, sprang as naturally from the salt sea as Aphrodite did; and the man who suspects artifice in it, or invention, has had his mind perverted by the scepticism of modern society——"

"Is my dress so very wonderful?" said Sheila, with a grave complaisance. "I am pleased that the Lewis has produced such a fine thing, and perhaps you would like me to tell you its history. It was my papa bought a piece of blue serge in Stornoway. It cost 3*s.* 6*d.* a yard, and a dressmaker in Stornoway cut it for me, and I made it myself. That is all the history of the wonderful dress."

Suddenly Sheila seized her husband's arm. They had got down to the river by Mortlake; and there, on the broad bosom of the stream, a

long and slender boat was shooting by, pulled by four oarsmen clad in white flannel.

"How can they go out in such a boat?" said Sheila, with a great alarm visible in her eyes: "it is scarcely a boat at all; and if they touch a rock, or if the wind catches them——

"Don't be frightened, Sheila," said her husband. "They are quite safe. There are no rocks in our rivers; and the wind does not give us squalls here like those on Loch Roag. You will see hundreds of those boats by and by, and perhaps you yourself will go out in one——"

"Oh, never, never!" she said, almost with a shudder.

"Why, if the people here heard you, they would not know how brave a sailor you are. You are not afraid to go out at night by yourself on the sea; and you won't go on a smooth inland river——"

"But those boats—if you touch them they must go over."

She seemed glad to get away from the river. She could not be persuaded of the safety of the slender craft of the Thames; and, indeed, for some time after seemed so strangely depressed that Lavender begged and prayed of her to tell him what was the matter. It was simple enough. She had heard him speak of his boating

adventures. Was it in such boats as that she had just seen; and might he not be some day going out in one of them, and an accident—the breaking of an oar—a gust of wind—

There was nothing for it but to reassure her by a solemn promise that in no circumstance whatever, would he, Lavender, go into a boat without her express permission; whereupon Sheila was as grateful to him as though he had dowered her with a kingdom.

This was not the Richmond Hill of her fancy—this spacious height, with its great mansions, its magnificent elms, and its view of all the westward and wooded country, with the blue-white streak of the river winding through the green foliage. Where was the farm? The famous Lass of Richmond Hill must have lived on a farm; but here, surely, were the houses of great lords and nobles, which had apparently been there for years and years. And was this really an hotel that they stopped at—this great building, that she could only compare to Stornoway Castle?

"Now, Sheila," said Lavender, after they had ordered dinner, and gone out, "mind you keep a tight hold on that leash, for Bras will see strange things in the Park."

"It is I who will see strange things," she

said; and the prophecy was amply fulfilled. For as they went along the broad path, and came better into view of the splendid undulations of woodland, and pasture, and fern; when, on the one hand, they saw the Thames, far below them, flowing through the green and spacious valley, and, on the other hand, caught some dusky glimpse of the far white houses of London—it seemed to her that she had got into a new world, and that this world was far more beautiful than the great city she had left. She did not care so much for the famous view from the Hill. She had cast one quick look to the horizon, with one throb of expectation that the sea might be there. There was no sea there; only the faint blue of long lines of country apparently without limit. Moreover, over the western landscape a faint haze prevailed, that increased in the distance and softened down the more distant woods into a sober grey. That great extent of wooded plain, lying sleepily in its pale mists, was not so cheerful as the scene around her, where the sunlight was sharp and clear, the air fresh, the trees flooded with a pure and bright colour. Here, indeed, was a cheerful and beautiful world; and she was full of curiosity to know all about it and its strange features. What was the name of this tree, and

how did it differ from that? Were not these rabbits over by the fence; and did rabbits live in the midst of trees and bushes? What sort of wood was the fence made of; and was it not terribly expensive to have such a protection? Could not he tell the cost of a wooden fence? Why did they not use wire netting? Was not that a loch away down there, and what was its name? A loch without a name? Did the salmon come up to it; and did any sea-birds ever come inland and build their nests on its margin?

"Oh, Bras, you must come and look at the loch. It is a long time since you will see a loch."

And away she went through the thick breckan, holding on to the swaying leash that held the galloping greyhound, and running as swiftly as though she had been making down for the shore to get out the *Maighdean-mhara*.

"Sheila!" called her husband, "don't be foolish!"

"Sheila!" called Ingram, "have pity on an old man——"

Suddenly she stopped. A brace of partridges had suddenly sprung up at some little distance, and, with a wild whirr of their wings, were now directing their low and rapid flight towards the bottom of the valley.

"What birds are those?" she said, peremptorily.

She took no notice of the fact that her companions were pretty nearly too blown to speak. There was a brisk life and colour in her face; and all her attention was absorbed in watching the flight of the birds. Lavender fancied he saw in the fixed and keen look something of old Mackenzie's grey eye—it was the first trace of a likeness to her father he had seen.

"You bad girl," he said, "they are partridges."

She paid no heed to this reproach; for what were those other things over there underneath the trees? Bras had pricked up his ears, and there was a strange excitement in his look and in his trembling frame.

"Deer!" she cried, with her eyes as fixed as were those of the dog beside her.

"Well," said her husband, calmly, "what although they are deer?"

"But Bras——" she said; and with that she caught the leash with both her hands.

"Bras won't mind them, if you keep him quiet. I suppose you can manage him better than I can. I wish we had brought a whip."

"I would rather let him kill every deer in the Park than touch him with a whip," said Sheila, proudly.

"You fearful creature, you don't know what you say. That is high treason. If George Ranger heard you, he would have you hanged in front of the Star and Garter."

"Who is George Ranger?" said Sheila, with an air as if she had said, "*Do you know that I am the daughter of the King of Borva, and whoever touches me will have to answer to my papa, who is not afraid of any George Ranger.*"

"He is a great lord who hangs all persons who disturb the deer in this Park."

"But why do they not go away?" said Sheila, impatiently. "I have never seen any deer so stupid. It is their own fault if they are disturbed; why do they remain so near to people and to houses?"

"My dear child, if Bras wasn't here, you would probably find some of those deer coming up to see if you had any bits of sugar or pieces of bread about your pockets."

"Then they are like sheep, they are not like deer," she said with some contempt. "If I could only tell Bras that it is sheep he will be looking at, he would not look any more. And so small they are; they are as small as the roe; but they have horns as big as many of the red deer. Do the people eat them?"

"I suppose so."

"And what will they cost?"

"I am sure I can't tell you."

"Are they as good as the roe or the big deer?"

"I don't know that either. I don't think I ever ate fallow-deer. But you know they are not kept here for that purpose. A great many gentlemen in this country keep a lot of them in their parks, merely to look pretty. They cost a great deal more than they produce——"

"They must eat up a great deal of fine grass," said Sheila, almost sorrowfully. "It is a beautiful ground for sheep—no rushes, no peat-moss, only fine, good grass, and dry land. I should like my papa to see all this beautiful ground."

"I fancy he has seen it."

"Was my papa here?"

"I think he said so."

"And did he see those deer?"

"Doubtless."

"He never told me of them," she said, wondering that her papa had seen all these strange things without speaking of them.

By this time they had pretty nearly got down to the little lake; and Bras had been alternately coaxed and threatened into a quiescent mood. Sheila evidently expected to hear a flapping of sea-fowls' wings when they got near the margin;

and looked all round for the first sudden dart from the banks. But a dead silence prevailed; and as there were neither fish nor birds to watch, she went along to a wooden bench, and sat down there, one of her companions on each hand. It was a pretty scene that lay before her—the small stretch of water ruffled with the wind, but showing a dash of blue sky here and there—the trees in the enclosure beyond clad in their summer foliage, the smooth greensward shining in the afternoon sunlight. Here, at least, was absolute quiet after the roar of London; and it was somewhat wistfully that she asked her husband how far this place was from her home, and whether, when he was at work, she could not come down here by herself.

"Certainly," he said, never dreaming that she would think of doing such a thing.

By and by they returned to the hotel, and while they sat at dinner a great fire of sunset spread over the west, and the far woods became of a rich purple, streaked here and there with lines of pale white mist. The river caught the glow of the crimson clouds above, and shone duskily red amid the dark green of the trees. Deeper and deeper grew the colour of the sun as it sank to the horizon, until it disappeared behind one low bar of purple cloud; and then

the wild glow in the west slowly faded away, the river became pallid and indistinct, the white mists over the distant woods seemed to grow denser, and then, as here and there a lamp was lit far down in the valley, one or two pale stars appeared in the sky overhead, and the night came on apace.

"It is so strange," Sheila said, "to find the darkness coming on, and not to hear the sound of the waves. I wonder if it is a fine night at Borva."

Her husband went over to her, and led her back to the table, where the candles, shining over the white cloth and the coloured glasses, offered a more cheerful picture than the deepening landscape outside. They were in a private room; so that, when dinner was over, Sheila was allowed to amuse herself with the fruit, while her two companions lit their cigars. Where was the quaint old piano, now; and the glass of hot whisky and water; and the "Lament of Monaltrie," or "Love in thine eyes for ever plays"? It seemed, but for the greatness of the room, to be a repetition of one of those evenings at Borva that now belonged to a far-off past. Here was Sheila, not minding the smoke, listening to Ingram as of old, and sometimes saying something in that sweetly-inflected speech

of hers; here was Ingram, talking, as it were, out of a brown study, and morosely objecting to pretty nearly everything Lavender said, but always ready to prove Sheila right; and Lavender himself, as unlike a married man as ever, talking impatiently, impetuously, and wildly, except at such times as he said something to his young wife, and then some brief smile and look, or some pat on the hand, said more than words. But where, Sheila may have thought, was the one wanting to complete the group? Has he gone down to Borvabost to see about the cargoes of fish to be sent off in the morning? Perhaps he is talking to Duncan outside about the cleaning of the guns, or making up cartridges in the kitchen. When Sheila's attention wandered away from the talk of her companions, she could not help listening for the sound of the waves; and as there was no such message coming to her from the great and wooded plain without, her fancy took her away across that mighty country she had travelled through, and carried her up to the island of Loch Roag, until she almost fancied she could smell the peat-smoke in the night-air, and listen to the sea, and hear her father pacing up and down the gravel outside the house, perhaps thinking of her as she was thinking of him.

This little excursion to Richmond was long remembered by those three. It was the last of their meetings before Sheila was ushered into the big world, to busy herself with new occupations and cares. It was a pleasant little journey throughout; for as they got into the landau to drive back to town, the moon was shining high up in the southern heavens, and the air was mild and fresh, so that they had the carriage opened, and Sheila, well wrapped up, lay and looked around her with a strange wonder and joy as they drove underneath the shadow of the trees and out again into the clear sheen of the night. They saw the river, too, flowing smoothly and palely down between its dark banks; and somehow here the silence checked them, and they hummed no more those duets they used to sing up at Borva. Of what were they thinking, then, as they drove through the clear night, along the lonely road? Lavender, at least, was rejoicing at his great good fortune that he had secured for ever to himself the true-hearted girl who now sat opposite him, with the moonlight touching her face and hair; and he was laughing to himself at the notion that he did not properly appreciate her, or understand her, or perceive her real character. If not he, who then? Had he not watched every turn of her disposition, every

expression of her wishes, every grace of her manner, and look of her eyes; and was he not overjoyed to find that the more he knew of her the more he loved her? Marriage had increased, rather than diminished, the mystery and wonder he had woven about her. He was more her lover now than he had been before his marriage. Who could see in her eyes what he saw? Elderly folks can look at a girl's eyes, and see that they are brown, or blue, or green, as the case may be; but the lover looks at them and sees in them the magic mirror of a hundred possible worlds. How can he fathom the sea of dreams that lies there, or tell what strange fancies and reminiscences may be involved in an absent look? Is she thinking of starlit nights on some distant lake; or of the old bygone days on the hills? All her former life is told there, and yet but half-told, and he longs to become possessed of all the beautiful past that she has seen. Here is a constant mystery to him, and there is a singular and wistful attraction for him in those still deeps where the thoughts and dreams of an innocent soul lie but half revealed. He does not see those things in the eyes of women he is not in love with; but when, in after years, he is carelessly regarding this or the other woman, some chance look—some brief

and sudden turn of expression—will recall to him, as with a stroke of lightning, all the old wonder-time, and his heart will go nigh to breaking to think that he has grown old, that he has forgotten so much, and that the fair, wild days of romance and longing are passed away for ever.

"Ingram thinks I don't understand you yet, Sheila," he said to her, after they had got home, and their friend had gone.

Sheila only laughed, and said—

"I don't understand myself, sometimes."

"Eh? what?" he cried. "Do you mean to say that I have married a conundrum? If I have, I don't mean to give you up, any way; so you may go and get me a biscuit, and a drop of the whisky we brought from the North with us. For you are a ministering angel, Sheila, and not a conundrum at all."

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST PLUNGE.

Frank Lavender was a good deal more concerned than he chose to show about the effect that Sheila was likely to produce on his aunt; and when, at length, the day arrived on which the young folks were to go down to Kensington Gore, he had inwardly to confess that Sheila seemed a great deal less perturbed than himself. Her perfect calmness and self-possession surprised him. The manner in which she had dressed herself, with certain modifications which he could not help approving, according to the fashion of the time, seemed to him a miracle of dexterity; and how had she acquired the art of looking at ease in this attire, which was much more cumbrous than that she had usually worn in Borva?

If Lavender had but known the truth, he

would have begun to believe something of what Ingram had vaguely hinted. This poor girl was looking towards her visit to Kensington Gore as the most painful trial of her life. While she was outwardly calm and firm, and even cheerful, her heart sank within her as she thought of the dreaded interview. Those garments which she wore with such an appearance of ease and comfort had been the result of many an hour of anxiety; for how was she to tell, from her husband's raillery, what colours the terrible old lady in Kensington would probably like? He did not know that every word he said in joke about his aunt's temper, her peevish ways, the awful consequences of offending her, and so forth, were like so many needles stuck into the girl's heart, until she was ready to cry out to be released from this fearful ordeal. Moreover, as the day came near, what he could not see in her, she saw in him. Was she likely to be reassured when she perceived that her husband, in spite of all his fun, was really anxious; and when she knew that some blunder on her part might ruin him? In fact, if he had suspected for a moment that she was really trembling to think of what might happen, he might have made some effort to give her courage. But apparently Sheila was as cool and collected

as if she had been going to see John the Piper. He believed she could have gone to be presented to the Queen without a single tremor of the heart.

Still, he was a man, and therefore bound to assume an air of patronage.

"She won't eat you, really," he said to Sheila, as they were driving in a hansom down Kensington Palace Gardens. "All you have got to do is to believe in her theories of food. She won't make you a martyr to them. She measures every half-ounce of what she eats; but she won't starve you; and I am glad to think, Sheila, that you have brought a remarkably good and sensible appetite with you from Lewis. Oh, by the way, take care you say nothing against Marcus Aurelius."

"I don't know who he was, dear," observed Sheila, meekly.

"He was a Roman Emperor, and a philosopher. I suppose it was because he was an Emperor that he found it easy to be a philosopher. However, my aunt is awful nuts on Marcus Aurelius—I beg your pardon, you don't know the phrase. My aunt makes Marcus Aurelius her Bible, and she is sure to read you bits from him, which you must believe, you know."

"I will try," said Sheila, doubtfully; "but if——"

"Oh, it has nothing to do with religion. I don't think anybody knows what Marcus Aurelius means, so you may as well believe it. Ingram swears by him, but he is always full of odd crotchets."

"Does Mr. Ingram believe in Marcus Aurelius?" said Sheila, with some accession of interest.

"Why, he gave my aunt the book years ago—confound him!—and ever since she has been a nuisance to her friends. For my own part, you know, I don't believe that Marcus Aurelius was quite such an ass as Plato. He talks the same sort of perpetual commonplaces, but it isn't about the True, and the Good, and the Beautiful. Would you like me to repeat to you one of the Dialogues of Plato—about the immortality of Mr. Cole, and the moral effect of the South Kensington Museum?"

"No, dear, I shouldn't," said Sheila.

"You deprive yourself of a treat, but never mind. Here we are at my aunt's house."

Sheila timidly glanced at the place, while her husband paid the cabman. It was a tall, narrow, dingy-looking house of a dark brick, with some black-green ivy at the foot of the walls, and

with crimson curtains formally arranged in every one of the windows. If Mrs. Lavender was a rich old lady, why did she live in such a gloomy building? Sheila had seen beautiful white houses in all parts of London—her own house, for example, was ever so much more cheerful than this one; and yet she had heard with awe of the value of this depressing little mansion in Kensington Gore.

The door was opened by a man, who showed them upstairs, and announced their names. Sheila's heart beat quickly. She entered the drawing-room with a sort of mist before her eyes; and found herself going forward to a lady who sat at the further end. She had a strangely vivid impression, amid all her alarm, that this old lady looked like the withered kernel of a nut. Or was she not like a cockatoo? It was through no anticipation of dislike to Mrs. Lavender that the imagination of the girl got hold of that notion. But the little old lady held her head like a cockatoo. She had the hard, staring, observant, and unimpressionable eyes of a cockatoo. What was there, moreover, about the decorations of her head that reminded one of a cockatoo when it puts up its crest and causes its feathers to look like sticks of celery?

"Aunt Lavender, this is my wife."

"I am glad to see you, dear," said the old lady, giving her hand, but not rising. "Sit down. When you are a little nervous, you ought to sit down. Frank, give me that ammonia from the mantelpiece."

It was in a small glass phial, and labelled "Poison." She smelt the stopper, and then handed it to Sheila, telling her to do the same.

"Why did your maid do your hair in such a way?" she asked, suddenly.

"I haven't got a maid," said Sheila, "and I always do my hair so."

"Don't be offended. I like it. But you must not make a fool of yourself. Your hair is too much that of a country beauty going to a ball. Paterson will show you how to do your hair."

"Oh, I say, aunt," cried Lavender, with a fine show of carelessness, "you mustn't go and spoil her hair. I think it is very pretty as it is; and that woman of yours would simply go and make a mop of it. You'd think the girls now-a-days dressed their hair by shoving their head into a furze-bush and giving it a couple of turns."

She paid no heed to him, but turned to Sheila, and said—

"You are an only child?"

"Yes."

"Why did you leave your father?"

The question was rather a cruel one, and it stung Sheila into answering bravely—

"Because my husband wished me."

"Oh. You think your husband is to be the first law of your life?"

"Yes, I do."

"Even when he is only silly Frank Lavender!"

Sheila rose. There was a quivering of her lips, but no weakness in the proud, indignant look of her eyes.

"What you may say of me, that I do not care. But I will not remain to hear my husband insulted."

"Sheila," said Lavender, vexed and anxious, and yet pleased at the same time by the courage of the girl. "Sheila, it is only a joke—you must not mind—it is only a bit of fun——"

"I do not understand such jests," she said, calmly.

"Sit down, like a good girl," said the old lady, with an air of absolute indifference. "I did not mean to offend you. Sit down, and be quiet. You will destroy your nervous system if you give way to such impulses. I think you are healthy; I like the look of you; but you will never reach

a good age, as I hope to do, except by moderating your passions. That is well; now take the ammonia again, and give it to me. You don't wish to die young, I suppose?"

"I am not afraid of dying," said Sheila.

"Ring the bell, Frank."

He did so, and a tall, spare, grave-faced woman appeared.

"Paterson, you must put luncheon on to two ten. I ordered it at one fifty, did I not?"

"Yes, m'm."

"See that it is served at two ten; and take this young lady and get her hair properly done, you understand? My nephew and I will wait luncheon for her."

"Yes, m'm."

Sheila rose, with a great swelling in her throat. All her courage had ebbed away. She had reflected how pained her husband would be if she did not please this old lady; and she was now prepared to do anything she was told, to receive meekly any remarks that might be made to her, to be quite obedient, and gentle, and submissive. But what was this tall and terrible woman going to do to her? Did she really mean to cut away those great masses of hair to which Mrs. Lavender had objected? Sheila would have let her hair be cut willingly, for her husband's sake;

but, as she went to the door, some wild and despairing notion came into her head of what her husband might think of her, when once she was shorn of this beautiful personal feature. Would he look at her with surprise—perhaps even with disappointment?

"Mind you don't keep luncheon late," he said to her, as she passed him.

She but indistinctly heard him, so great was the trembling within her. Her father would scarcely know his altered Sheila, when she went back to Borva; and what would Mairi say—Mairi who had many a time helped her to arrange those long tresses, and who was as proud of them as if they were her own? She followed Mrs. Lavender's tall maid up-stairs. She entered a small dressing-room, and glanced nervously round. Then she suddenly turned, looked for a moment at the woman, and said, with tears rushing up into her eyes—

"Does Mrs. Lavender wish me to cut my hair?"

The woman regarded her with astonishment.

"Cut, miss?—ma'am, I beg your pardon. No, ma'am, not at all: I suppose it is only some difference in the arrangement, ma'am. Mrs. Lavender is very particular about the hair; and she has asked me to show several ladies how to

dress their hair in the way she likes. But perhaps you would prefer letting it remain as it is, ma'am?"

"Oh no, not at all!" said Sheila. "I should like to have it just as Mrs. Lavender wishes—in every way just as she wishes. Only, it will not be necessary to cut any?"

"Oh no, miss—ma'am; and it would be a great pity, if I may say so, to cut *your* hair."

Sheila was pleased to hear that. Here was a woman who had a large experience in such matters, among those very ladies of her husband's social circle whom she had been a little afraid to meet. Mrs. Paterson seemed to admire her hair as much as the simple Mairi had done; and Sheila soon began to have less fear of this terrible tiring-woman, who forthwith proceeded with her task.

The young wife went down-stairs with a tower upon her head. She was very uncomfortable. She had seen, it is true, that this method of dressing the hair really became her—or, rather, would become her in certain circumstances. It was grand, imposing, statuesque; but then she did not feel statuesque just at this moment. She could have dressed herself to suit this style of hair; she could have worn it with confidence if she had got it up herself; but here she was the victim of an experiment—she felt like a schoolgirl about

for the first time to appear in public in a long dress—and she was terribly afraid her husband would laugh at her. If he had any such inclination, he courteously suppressed it. He said the massive simplicity of this dressing of the hair suited her admirably. Mrs. Lavender said that Paterson was an invaluable woman; and then they went down to the dining-room on the ground-floor, where luncheon had been laid.

The man who had opened the door waited on the two strangers; the invaluable Paterson acted as a sort of henchwoman to her mistress, standing by her chair, and supplying her wants. She also had the management of a small pair of silver scales, in which pretty nearly everything that Mrs. Lavender took in the way of solid food was carefully and accurately weighed. The conversation was chiefly alimentary; and Sheila listened with a growing wonder to the description of the devices by which the ladies of Mrs. Lavender's acquaintance were wont to cheat fatigue, or win an appetite, or preserve their colour. When, by accident, the girl herself was appealed to, she had to confess to an astonishing ignorance of all such resources. She knew nothing of the relative strengths and effects of wines; though she was frankly ready to make any experiment her husband recommended. She knew what camphor

was, but had never heard of bismuth. On cross-examination, she had to admit that Eau de Cologne did not seem to her likely to be a pleasant liquor before going to a ball. Did she not know the effect on brown hair of washing it in soda-water every night? She was equably confessing her ignorance on all such points, when she was startled by a sudden question from Mrs. Lavender. Did she know what she was doing?

She looked at her plate; there was on it a piece of cheese to which she had thoughtlessly helped herself. Somebody had called it Roquefort—that was all she knew.

"You have as much there, child, as would kill a ploughman; and I suppose you would not have had the sense to leave it."

"Is it poison?" said Sheila, regarding her plate with horror.

"All cheese is. Paterson, my scales."

She had Sheila's plate brought to her, and the proper modicum of cheese cut, weighed, and sent back.

"Remember, whatever house you are at, never to have more Roquefort than that."

"It would be simpler to do without it," said Sheila.

"It would be simple enough to do without a great many things," said Mrs. Lavender, severely.

"But the wisdom of living is to enjoy as many different things as possible, so long as you do so in moderation, and preserve your health. You are young—you don't think of such things. You think, because you have good teeth and a clear complexion, you can eat anything. But that won't last. A time will come. Do you not know what the great Emperor, Marcus Antoninus, says? —'*In a little while thou wilt be nobody and nowhere, like Hadrianus and Augustus.*'"

"Yes," said Sheila.

She had not enjoyed her luncheon much—she would rather have had a ham sandwich and a glass of spring water on the side of a Highland hill than this varied and fastidious repast accompanied by a good deal of physiology—but it was too bad that, having successfully got through it, she should be threatened with annihilation immediately afterwards. It was no sort of consolation to her to know that she would be in the same plight with two emperors.

"Frank, you can go and smoke a cigar in the conservatory, if you please. Your wife will come upstairs with me and have a talk."

Sheila would much rather have gone into the conservatory also; but she obediently followed Mrs. Lavender upstairs and into the drawing-room. It was rather a melancholy chamber—

the curtains shutting out most of the daylight, and leaving you in a semi-darkness that made the place look big, and vague, and spectral. The little, shrivelled woman, with the hard and staring eyes, and silver-grey hair, bade Sheila sit down beside her. She herself sat by a small table, on which there were a tiny pair of scales, a bottle of ammonia, a fan, and a book bound in an old-fashioned binding of scarlet morocco and gold. Sheila wished this old woman would not look at her so. She wished there was a window open, or a glint of sunlight coming in somewhere. But she was glad that her husband was enjoying himself in the conservatory; and that for two reasons. One of them was that she did not like the tone of his talk while he and his aunt had been conversing together about cosmetics and such matters. Not only did he betray a marvellous acquaintance with such things, but he seemed to take an odd sort of pleasure in exhibiting his knowledge. He talked in a mocking way about the tricks of fashionable women that Sheila did not quite like: and of course she naturally threw the blame on Mrs. Lavender. It was only when this old woman exerted a godless influence over him that her good boy talked in such a fashion. There was nothing of that about him up in Lewis, nor yet at home, in a certain snug little smoking-

room which these two had come to consider the most comfortable corner in the house. Sheila began to hate women who used lip-salve, and silently recorded a vow that never, never, never would she wear anybody's hair but her own.

"Do you suffer from headache?" said Mrs. Lavender, abruptly.

"Sometimes," said Sheila.

"How often? What is an average? Two a week?"

"Oh, sometimes I have not a headache for three or four months at a time."

"No toothache?"

"No."

"What did your mother die of?"

"It was a fever," said Sheila, in a low voice, "and she caught it while she was helping a family that was very bad with the fever."

"Does your father ever suffer from rheumatism?"

"No," said Sheila. "My papa is the strongest man in the Lewis, I am sure of that."

"But the strongest of us, you know," said Mrs. Lavender, looking hardly at the girl, "the strongest of us will die and go into the general order of the universe; and it is a good thing for you that, as you say, you are not afraid. Why should you be afraid? Listen to this passage."

She opened the red book, and guided herself to a certain page by one of a series of coloured ribbons.

"'*He who fears death either fears the loss of sensation or a different kind of sensation. But if thou shalt have no sensation, neither wilt thou feel any harm; and if thou shalt acquire another kind of sensation, thou wilt be a different kind of living being, and thou wilt not cease to live.*' Do you perceive the wisdom of that?"

"Yes," said Sheila, and her own voice seemed hollow and strange to her in this big and dimly-lit chamber. Mrs. Lavender turned over a few more pages, and proceeded to read again; and as she did so, in a low, unsympathetic, monotonous voice, a spell came over the girl, the weight at her heart grew more and more intolerable, and the room seemed to grow darker.

"'*Short then is the time which every man lives, and small the nook of the earth where he lives; and short too the longest posthumous fame, and even this only continued by a succession of poor human beings, who will very soon die, and who know not even themselves, much less him who died long ago.*' You cannot do better than ask your husband to buy you a copy of this book, and give it special study. It will comfort you in affliction, and reconcile you to whatever may

happen to you. Listen. '*Soon will the earth cover us all; then the earth, too, will change, and the things also which result from change will continue to change for ever, and these again for ever. For if a man reflects on the changes and transformations which follow one another like wave after wave and their rapidity, he will despise every thing which is perishable.*' Do you understand that?"

"Yes," said Sheila; and it seemed to her that she was being suffocated. Would not the grey walls burst asunder and show her one glimpse of the blue sky before she sank into unconsciousness? The monotonous tones of this old woman's voice sounded like the repetition of a psalm over a coffin. It was as if she was already shut out from life, and could only hear in a vague way the dismal words being chanted over her by the people in the other world. She rose, steadied herself for a moment by placing her hand on the back of the chair, and managed to say—

"Mrs. Lavender, forgive me for one moment; I wish to speak to my husband."

She went to the door—Mrs. Lavender being too surprised to follow her—and made her way down-stairs. She had seen the conservatory at the end of a certain passage. She reached it; and then she scarcely knew any more, except

that her husband caught her in his arms as she cried—

"Oh, Frank, Frank, take me away from this house—I am afraid: it terrifies me!"

"Sheila, what on earth is the matter? Here, come out to the fresh air. By Jove, how pale you are! Will you have some water?"

He could not get to understand thoroughly what had occurred. What he clearly did learn from Sheila's disjointed and timid explanations was that there had been another "scene," and he knew that of all things in the world his aunt hated "scenes" the worst. As soon as he saw that there was little the matter with Sheila beyond considerable mental perturbation, he could not help addressing some little remonstrance to her, and reminding her how necessary it was that she should not offend the old lady upstairs.

"You should not be so excitable, Sheila," he said. "You take such exaggerated notions about things. I am sure my aunt meant nothing unkind. And what did you say when you came away?"

"I said I wanted to see you. Are you angry with me?"

"No, of course not. But then, you see, it is a little vexing—just at this moment——. Well,

let us go upstairs at once, and try and make up some excuse, like a good girl—say you felt faint —anything——"

"And you will come with me?"

"Yes. Now do try, Sheila, to make friends with my aunt. She's not such a bad sort of creature as you seem to think. She's been very kind to me—she'll be very kind to you when she knows you more."

Fortunately no excuse was necessary; for Mrs. Lavender, in Sheila's absence, had arrived at the conclusion that the girl's temporary faintness was due to that piece of Roquefort.

"You see you must be careful," she said, when they entered the room. "You are unaccustomed to a great many things you will like afterwards."

"And the room is a little close," said Lavender.

"I don't think so," said his aunt, sharply; "look at the thermometer."

"I didn't mean for you and me, Aunt Lavender," he said, "but for her. Sheila has been accustomed to live almost wholly in the open air."

"The open air, in moderation, is an excellent thing. I go out myself every afternoon, wet or dry. And I was going to propose, Frank, that

you should leave her here with me for the afternoon, and come back and dine with us at seven. I am going out at four thirty, and she could go with me."

"It's very kind of you, Aunt Lavender; but we have promised to call on some people close by here at four."

Sheila looked up, frightened. The statement was an audacious perversion of the truth. But then, Frank Lavender knew very well what his aunt meant by going into the open air every afternoon, wet or dry. At a certain hour her brougham was brought round; she got into it, and had both doors and windows hermetically sealed; and then, in a semi-somnolent state—she was driven slowly and monotonously round the Park. How would Sheila fare if she were shut up in this box? He told a lie with great equanimity, and saved her.

Then Sheila was taken away to get on her things; and her husband waited, with some little trepidation, to hear what his aunt would say about her. He had not long to wait.

"She's got a bad temper, Frank."

"Oh, I don't think so, Aunt Lavender," he said, considerably startled.

"Mark my words, she's got a bad temper, and she is not nearly so soft as she tries to make

out. That girl has a great deal of firmness, Frank."

"I find her as gentle and submissive as a girl could be—a little too gentle, perhaps, and anxious to study the wishes of other folks."

"That is all very well with you. You are her master. She is not likely to quarrel with her bread and butter. But you'll see if she does not hold her own when she gets among your friends."

"I hope she will hold her own," he said, with some unnecessary emphasis.

The old lady only shook her head.

"I am very sorry you should have taken a prejudice against her, Aunt," said he, presently.

"I take a prejudice? Don't let me hear the word again, Frank. You know I have no prejudices. If I cannot give you a reason for anything I believe, then I cease to believe it."

"You have not heard her sing," he said, suddenly remembering that this means of conquering the old lady had been neglected.

"I have no doubt she has many accomplishments," said Mrs. Lavender, coldly. "In time, I suppose, she will get over that extraordinary accent she has."

"Many people like it."

"I dare say you do, at present. But you

may tire of it. You married her in a hurry; and you have not got rid of your romance yet. At the same time, I dare say she is a very good sort of a girl, and will not disgrace you, if you instruct her and manage her properly. But remember my words, she has a temper, and you will find it out if you thwart her."

How sweet and fresh the air was, even in Kensington, when Sheila, having dressed and come down-stairs, and having dutifully kissed Mrs. Lavender and bade her good-bye, went outside with her husband. It was like coming back to the light of day from inside the imaginary coffin in which she had fancied herself placed. A soft west wind was blowing over the Park, and a fairly clear sunlight shining on the May green of the trees. And then she hung on her husband's arm; and she had him to speak to instead of the terrible old woman who talked about dying.

And yet she hoped she had not offended Mrs. Lavender, for Frank's sake. What he thought about the matter he prudently resolved to conceal.

"Do you know that you have greatly pleased my aunt?" he said, without the least compunction. He knew if he breathed the least hint about what had actually been said, any possible

amity between the two women would be rendered impossible for ever.

"Have I really?" said Sheila, very much astonished, but never thinking for a moment of doubting anything said by her husband.

"Oh, she likes you awfully!" he said, with an infinite coolness.

"I am so glad!" said Sheila, with her face brightening. "I was so afraid, dear, I had offended her. She did not look pleased with me."

By this time they had got into a hansom, and were driving down to the South Kensington Museum. Lavender would have preferred going into the Park; but what if his aunt, in driving by, were to see them? He explained to Sheila the absolute necessity of his having to tell that fib about the four o'clock engagement: and when she heard described the drive in the closed brougham which she had escaped, perhaps she was not so greatly inclined as she ought to have been to protest against that piece of wickedness.

"Oh yes, she likes you awfully," he repeated, "and you must get to like her. Don't be frightened by her harsh way of saying things; it is only a mannerism. She is really a kind-hearted woman, and would do anything for me.

That's her best feature, looking at her character from my point of view."

"How often must we go to see her?" asked Sheila.

"Oh, not very often. But she will get up dinner-parties, at which you will be introduced to batches of her friends. And then the best thing you can do is to put yourself under her instructions, and take her advice about your dress and such matters just as you did about your hair. That was very good of you."

"I am glad you were pleased with me," said Sheila. "I will do what I can to like her. But she must talk more respectfully of you."

Lavender laughed that little matter off as a joke; but it was far from being a joke to Sheila. She would try to like that old woman—yes; her duty to her husband demanded that she should. But there are some things which a wife—especially a girl who has been newly made a wife—will never forget; which, on the contrary, she will remember with burning cheeks, and anger, and indignation.

CHAPTER III.

TRANSFORMATION.

Had she, then, Lavender could not help asking himself, a bad temper, or any other qualities or characteristics which were apparent to other people but not to him? Was it possible that, after all, Ingram was right; and that he had yet to learn the nature of the girl he had married? It would be unfair to say that he suspected something wrong about his wife—that he fancied she had managed to conceal something—merely because Mrs. Lavender had said that Sheila had a bad temper; but here was another person who maintained that, when the days of his romance were over, he would see the girl in another light.

Nay, as he continued to ask himself, had not the change already begun? He grew less and less accustomed to see in Sheila a beautiful wild sea-bird that had fluttered down, for a time, into

a strange home in the South. He had not quite forgotten or abandoned those imaginative scenes in which the wonderful Sea-Princess was to enter crowded drawing-rooms and have all the world standing back to regard her and admire her, and sing her praises. But now he was not so sure that that would be the result of Sheila's entrance into society. As the date of a certain small dinner-party drew near, he began to wish she was more like the women he knew. He did not object to her strange sweet ways of speech, nor to her odd likes and dislikes, nor even to an unhesitating frankness that nearly approached rudeness sometimes in its scorn of all compromise with the truth; but how would others regard these things? He did not wish to gain the reputation of having married an oddity.

"Sheila," he said, on the morning of the day on which they were going to this dinner-party, "you should not say *like-a-ness*. There are only two syllables in *likeness*. It really does sound absurd to hear you say *like-a-ness*."

She looked up to him, with a quick trouble in her eyes. When had he objected to her manner of speaking before? And then she cast down her eyes again, and said, submissively—

"I will try not to speak like that. When

you go out, I take a book and read aloud, and try to speak like you; but I cannot learn all at once."

"*I* don't mind," he said, in an apologetic fashion; and he took her hand as if to show that he meant no unkindness. "But you know other people must think it so odd. I wonder why you should always say *gyarden* for *garden* now, when it is just as easy to say *garden*."

Once upon a time he had said that there was no English like the English spoken in Lewis, and had singled out this very word as typical of one peculiarity in the pronunciation. But Sheila did not remind him of that. She only said, in the same simple fashion,—

"If you will tell me my faults, I will try to correct them."

She turned away from him, to get an envelope for a letter she had been writing to her father. He fancied something was wrong, and perhaps some touch of compunction smote him, for he went after her, and took her hand again, and said, gently,—

"Look here, Sheila. When I point out any trifles like that, you must not call them faults, and fancy I have any serious complaint to make. It is for your own good that you should meet the people who will be your friends on equal

terms, and give them as little as possible to talk about."

"I should not mind their talking about me," said Sheila, with her eyes still cast down; "but it is your wife they must not talk about, and, if you will tell me anything I do wrong, I will correct it."

"Oh, you must not think it is anything so serious as that. You will soon pick up from the ladies you may meet some notion of how you differ from them; and if you should startle or puzzle them a little at first by talking about the chances of the fishing, or the catching of wild duck, or the way to reclaim bog-land, you will soon get over all that."

Sheila said nothing; but she made a mental memorandum of three things she was not to speak about. She did not know why these subjects should be forbidden; but she was in a strange land, and going to see strange people, whose habits were different from hers. Moreover, when her husband had gone, she reflected that these people, having no fishing, and no peat-mosses, and no wild duck, could not possibly be interested in such affairs; and thus she fancied she perceived the reason why she should avoid all mention of those things.

When, in the evening, Sheila came down

dressed and ready to go out, Lavender had to admit to himself that he had married an exceedingly beautiful girl, and that there was no country awkwardness about her manner, and no placid insipidity about her proud and handsome face. For one brief moment he triumphed in his heart, and had some wild glimpse of his old project of startling his small world with this vision from the northern seas. But when he got into the hired brougham, and thought of the people he was about to meet, and of the manner in which they would carry away such and such impressions of the girl, he lost faith in that project. He would much rather have had Sheila unnoticeable and unnoticed—one who would quietly take her place at the dinner-table and attract no more special attention than the flowers, for example, which everyone would glance at with some satisfaction and then forget in the interest of talking and dining. He knew that Ingram would have taken Sheila anywhere, in her blue serge dress, and been quite content and oblivious of observation. But then Ingram was independent of those social circles in which a married man must move, and in which his position is often defined for him by the disposition and manners of his wife. Ingram did not know how women talked. It was for Sheila's own

sake, he persuaded himself, that he was anxious about the impression she should make, and that he had drilled her in all that she should do and say.

"Above all things," he said, "mind you take no notice of me. Another man will take you in to dinner, of course; and I shall take in somebody else; and we shall not be near each other. But it's after dinner, I mean—when the men go into the drawing-room, don't you come and speak to me, or take any notice of me whatever."

"Mayn't I look at you, Frank?"

"If you do, you'll have half-a-dozen people, all watching you, saying to themselves or to each other, 'Poor thing, she hasn't got over her infatuation yet. Isn't it pretty to see how naturally her eyes turn towards him?'"

"But I shouldn't mind them saying that," said Sheila, with a smile.

"Oh, you musn't be pitied in that fashion. Let them keep their compassion to themselves."

"Do you know, dear," said Sheila, very quietly, "that I think you exaggerate the interest people will take in me. I don't think I can be of such importance to them. I don't think they will be watching me as you fancy."

"Oh, you don't know," he said. "I knew

they fancy I have done something romantic, heroic, and all that kind of thing, and they are curious to see you."

"They cannot hurt me by looking at me," said Sheila, simply. "And they will soon find out how little there is to discover."

The house being in Holland Park, they had not far to go; and just as they were driving up to the door, a young man, slight, sandy-haired, and stooping, got out of a hansom and crossed the pavement."

"By Jove," said Lavender, "there is Redburn. That is Lord Arthur Redburn, Sheila: mind, if you should talk to him, not to call him 'my lord.'"

Sheila laughed, and said—

"How am I to remember all these things?"

They got into the house, and by and by Lavender found himself, with Sheila on his arm, entering a drawing-room to present her to certain of his friends. It was a large room, with a great deal of gilding and colour about it, and with a conservatory at the further end; but the blaze of light had not so bewildering an effect on Sheila's eyes as the appearance of two ladies to whom she was now introduced. She had heard much about them. She was curious to see them. Many a time had she thought

over the strange story Lavender had told her of the woman who heard that her husband was dying in hospital during the war, and started off, herself and her daughter, to find him out—how there was in the same hospital another dying man whom they had known some years before, and who had gone away because this daughter would not listen to him—how this man, being very near to death, begged that the girl would do him the last favour he would ask of her, of wearing his name and inheriting his property; and how, some few hours after the strange and sad ceremony had been performed, he breathed his last, happy in holding her hand. The father died next day; and the two widows were thrown upon the world, almost without friends, but not without means. This man Lorraine had been possessed of considerable wealth; and the girl who had suddenly become mistress of it found herself able to employ all possible methods of assuaging her mother's grief. They began to travel. The two women went from capital to capital, until at last they came to London; and here, having gathered around them a considerable number of friends, they proposed to take up their residence permanently. Lavender had often talked to Sheila about Mrs. Lorraine—about her shrewdness, her sharp sayings, and the odd

contrast between this clever, keen, frank woman of the world and the woman one would have expected to be the heroine of a pathetic tale.

But were there two Mrs. Lorraines? That had been Sheila's first question to herself when, after having been introduced to one lady under that name, she suddenly saw before her another, who was introduced to her as Mrs. Kavanagh. The mother and daughter were singularly alike. They had the same slight and graceful figure, which made them appear taller than they really were; the same pale, fine, and rather handsome features; the same large, clear, grey eyes; and apparently the same abundant mass of soft fair hair, heavily plaited in the latest fashion. They were both dressed entirely in black, except that the daughter had a band of blue round her slender waist. It was soon apparent, too, that the manner of the two women was singularly different; Mrs. Kavanagh bearing herself with a certain sad reserve that almost approached melancholy at times, while her daughter, with more life and spirit in her face, passed rapidly through all sorts of varying moods, until one could scarcely tell whether the affectation lay in a certain cynical audacity in her speech, or whether it lay in her assumption of a certain coyness and archness, or whether there was no affectation at all

in the matter. However that might be, there could be no doubt about the sincerity of those grey eyes of hers. There was something almost cruelly frank in the clear look of them; and when her face was not lit up by some passing smile, the pale and fine features seemed to borrow something of severity from her unflinching, calm, and dispassionate habit of regarding those around her.

Sheila was prepared to like Mrs. Lorraine from the first moment she had caught sight of her. The honesty of the grey eyes attracted her. And, indeed, the young widow seemed very much interested in the young wife, and, so far as she could in that awkward period just before dinner, strove to make friends with her. Sheila was introduced to a number of people, but none of them pleased her as well as Mrs. Lorraine. Then dinner was announced, and Sheila found that she was being escorted across the passage to the room on the other side by the young man whom she had seen get out of the hansom.

This Lord Arthur Redburn was the younger son of a great Tory Duke; he represented in the House a small country borough which his father practically owned; he had a fair amount of ability, an uncommonly high opinion of himself, and a certain affectation of being bored by the

frivolous ways and talk of ordinary society. He gave himself credit for being the clever member of the family; and, if there was any cleverness going, he had it; but there were some who said that his reputation in the House and elsewhere as a good speaker was mainly based on the fact that he had an abundant assurance and was not easily put out. Unfortunately the public could come to no decision on the point, for the reporters were not kind to Lord Arthur; and the substance of his speeches was as unknown to the world as his manner of delivering them.

Now Mrs. Lorraine had intended to tell this young man something about the girl whom he was to take in to dinner; but she herself had been so occupied with Sheila that the opportunity escaped her. Lord Arthur accordingly knew only that he was beside a very pretty woman, who was a Mrs. Somebody—the exact name he had not caught—and that the few words she had spoken were pronounced in a curious way. Probably, he thought, she was from Dublin.

He also arrived at the conclusion that she was too pretty to know anything about the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, in which he was, for family reasons, deeply interested; and considered it more likely that she would prefer to talk about theatres and such things.

"Were you at Covent Garden last night?" he said.

"No," answered Sheila. "But I was there two days ago, and it is very pretty to see the flowers and the fruit, and they smell so sweetly as you walk through."

"Oh yes, it is delightful," said Lord Arthur. "But I was speaking of the theatre."

"Is there a theatre in there?"

He stared at her, and inwardly hoped she was not mad.

"Not in among the shops, no. But don't you know Covent Garden Theatre?"

"I have never been in any theatre, not yet," said Sheila.

And then it began to dawn upon him that he must be talking to Frank Lavender's wife. Was there not some rumour about the girl having come from a remote part of the Highlands? He determined on a bold stroke.

"You have not been long enough in London to see the theatres, I suppose."

And then Sheila, taking it for granted that he knew her husband very well, and that he was quite familiar with all the circumstances of the case, began to chat to him freely enough. He found that this Highland girl of whom he had heard vaguely was not at all shy. He began to

feel interested. By and by he actually made efforts to assist her frankness by becoming equally frank, and by telling her all he knew of the things with which they were mutually acquainted. Of course, by this time, they had got up into the Highlands. The young man had himself been in the Highlands—frequently, indeed. He had never crossed to Lewis, but he had seen the island from the Sutherlandshire coast. There were very many deer in Sutherlandshire, were there not? Yes, he had been out a great many times, and had his share of adventures. Had he not gone out before daylight, and waited on the top of a hill, hidden by some rocks, to watch the mists clear along the hill-sides and in the valley below? Did not he tremble when he fired his first shot, and had not something passed before his eyes so that he could not see for a moment whether the stag had fallen or was away like lightning down the bed of the stream? Somehow or other Lord Arthur found himself relating all his experiences as if he were a novice begging for the good opinion of a master. She knew all about it, obviously; and he would tell her his small adventures, if only that she might laugh at him. But Sheila did not laugh. She was greatly delighted to have this talk about the hills, and the deer, and the wet mornings.

She forgot all about the dinner before her. The servants whipped off successive plates without her seeing anything of them; they received random answers about wine, so that she had three full glasses standing by her untouched. She was no more in Holland Park at that moment than were the wild animals of which she spoke so proudly and lovingly. If the great and frail masses of flowers on the table brought her any perfume at all, it was a scent of peat-smoke. Lord Arthur thought that his companion was a little too frank and confiding; or rather that she would have been, had she been talking to anyone but himself. He rather liked it. He was pleased to have established friendly relations with a pretty woman in so short a space; but ought not her husband to give her a hint about not admitting all and sundry to the enjoyment of these favours? Perhaps, too, Lord Arthur felt bound to admit to himself there were some men who more than others inspired confidence in women. He laid no claims to being a fascinating person; but he had had his share of success; and considered that Sheila showed discrimination as well as good-nature in talking so to him. There was, after all, no necessity for her husband to warn her. She would know how to guard against admitting all men to a like intimacy. In the

meantime, he was very well pleased to be sitting beside this pretty and agreeable companion, who had an abundant fund of good spirits, and who showed no sort of conscious embarrassment in thanking you with a bright look of her eyes or by a smile when you told her something that pleased or amused her.

But these flattering little speculations were doomed to receive a sudden check. The juvenile M.P. began to remark that a shade occasionally crossed the face of his fair companion; and that she sometimes looked a little anxiously across the table, where Mr. Lavender and Mrs. Lorraine were seated, half-hidden from view by a heap of silver and flowers in the middle of the board. But though they could not easily be seen, except at such moments as they turned to address some neighbour, they could be distinctly enough heard, when there was any lull in the general conversation. And what Sheila heard did not please her. She began to like that fair, clear-eyed young woman less. Perhaps her husband meant nothing by the fashion in which he talked of marriage, and the condition of a married man; but she would rather have not heard him talk so. Moreover, she was aware that, in the gentlest possible fashion, Mrs. Lorraine was making fun of her companion, and exposing

him to small and graceful shafts of ridicule; while he seemed, on the whole, to enjoy these attacks.

The ingenious self-love of Lord Arthur Redburn, M.P., was severely wounded by the notion that, after all, he had been made a cat's-paw of by a jealous wife. He had been flattered by this girl's exceeding friendliness; he had given her credit for a genuine impulsiveness which seemed to him as pleasing as it was uncommon; and he had, with the moderation expected of a man in politics, who hoped some day to assist in the government of the nation by accepting a Junior Lordship, admired her. But was it all pretence? Was she paying court to him merely to annoy her husband? Had her enthusiasm about the shooting of red deer been prompted by a wish to attract a certain pair of eyes at the other side of the table? Lord Arthur began to sneer at himself for having been duped. He ought to have known. Women were as much women in a Hebridean island as in Bayswater. He began to treat Sheila with a little more coolness; while she became more and more preoccupied with the couple across the table, and sometimes was innocently rude in answering his questions somewhat at random

When the ladies were going into the drawing-

room, Mrs. Lorraine put her hand within Sheila's arm, and led her to the entrance of the conservatory.

"I hope we shall be friends," she said.

"I hope so," said Sheila, not very warmly.

"Until you get better acquainted with your husband's friends, you will feel rather lonely at being left as at present, I suppose."

"A little," said Sheila.

"It is a silly thing, altogether. If men smoked after dinner, I could understand it. But they merely sit, looking at wine they don't drink, talking a few commonplaces, and yawning."

"Why do they do it, then?" said Sheila.

"They don't do it everywhere. But here we keep to the manners and customs of the ancients."

"What do you know about the manners of the ancients?" said Mrs. Kavanagh, tapping her daughter's shoulder, as she passed with a sheet of music.

"I have studied them frequently, mamma," said the daughter with composure,—"in the monkey-house at the Zoological Gardens."

The mamma smiled and passed on to place the music on the piano. Sheila did not understand what her companion had said; and, indeed, Mrs. Lorraine immediately turned, with the same calm, fine face, and careless eyes, to ask Sheila

whether she would not, by and by, sing one of those northern songs of which Mr. Lavender had told her.

A tall girl, with her back-hair tied in a knot and her costume copied from a well-known pre-Raphaelite drawing, sat down to the piano, and sang a mystic song of the present day, in which the moon, the stars, and other natural objects behaved strangely, and were somehow mixed up with the appeal of a maiden who demanded that her dead lover should be reclaimed from the sea.

"Do you ever go down to your husband's studio?" said Mrs. Lorraine.

Sheila glanced towards the lady at the piano.

"Oh, you may talk," said Mrs. Lorraine, with the least expression of contempt in the grey eyes. "She is singing to gratify herself, not us."

"Yes, I sometimes go down," said Sheila, in as low a voice as she could manage without falling into a whisper; "and it is such a dismal place. It is very hard on him to have to work in a big bare room like that, with the windows half-blinded. But sometimes I think Frank would rather have me out of the way."

"And what would he do, if both of us were to pay him a visit?" said Mrs. Lorraine. "I should like to see the studio. Won't you call for me some day and take me with you?"

Take her with her, indeed! Sheila began to wonder that she did not propose to go alone. Fortunately, there was no need to answer the question; for at this moment the song came to an end, and there was a general movement and murmur of gratitude.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Lorraine, to the lady who had sung, and who was now returning to the photographs she had left. "Thank you very much. I knew some one would instantly ask you to sing that song—it is the most charming of all your songs, I think, and how well it suits your voice, too!"

Then she turned to Sheila again.

"How did you like Lord Arthur Redburn?"

"I think he is a very good young man."

"Young men are never good; but they may be amiable," said Mrs. Lorraine, not perceiving that Sheila had blundered on a wrong adjective, and that she had really meant that she thought him honest and pleasant.

"You did not speak at all, I think, to your neighbour on the right; that was wise of you. He is a most insufferable person, but mamma bears with him for the sake of his daughter, who sang just now. He is too rich. And he smiles blandly, and takes a sort of after-dinner view of things, as if he coincided with the arrangements

of Providence. Don't you take coffee? Tea, then. I have met your aunt—I mean Mr. Lavender's aunt—such a dear old lady she is!"

"I don't like her," said Sheila.

"Oh, don't you, really?"

"Not at present; but I shall try to like her."

"Well," said Mrs. Lorraine, calmly, "you know she has her peculiarities. I wish she wouldn't talk so much about Marcus Antoninus and doses of medicine. I fancy I smell calomel when she comes near. I suppose if she were in a pantomime, they'd dress her up as a phial, tie a string round her neck, and label her 'Poison.' Dear me, how languid one gets in this climate. Let us sit down. I wish I was as strong as mamma."

They sat down together, and Mrs. Lorraine evidently expected to be petted and made much of by her new companion. She gave herself pretty little airs and graces, and said no more cutting things about anybody. And Sheila somehow found herself being drawn to the girl, so that she could scarcely help taking her hand, and saying how sorry she was to see her so pale, and fine, and delicate. The hand, too, was so small that the tiny white fingers seemed scarcely bigger than the claws of a bird. Was not that slender waist, to which some little attention was

called by a belt of bold blue, just a little too slender for health, although the bust and shoulders were exquisitely and finely proportioned?

"We were at the Academy all the morning, and mamma is not a bit tired. Why has not Mr. Lavender anything in the Academy? Oh, I forgot," she added, with a smile; "of course he has been very much engaged. But now, I suppose, he will settle down to work."

Sheila wished that this fragile-looking girl would not so continually refer to her husband; but how was anyone to find fault with her, when she put a little air of plaintiveness into the ordinarily cold grey eyes, and looked at her small hand, as much as to say, "The fingers there are very small, and even whiter than the glove that covers them. They are the fingers of a child, who ought to be petted."

Then the men came in from the dining-room. Lavender looked round to see where Sheila was —perhaps with a trifle of disappointment that she was not the most prominent figure there. Had he expected to find all the women surrounding her, and admiring her, and all the men going up to pay court to her? Sheila was seated near a small table, and Mrs. Lorraine was showing her something. She was just like anybody else. If she was a wonderful Sea-Princess who had come

into a new world, no one seemed to observe her. The only thing that distinguished her from the women around her was her freshness of colour and the unusual combination of black eyelashes and dark blue eyes. Lavender had arranged that Sheila's first appearance in public should be at a very quiet little dinner-party ; but even here she failed to create any profound impression. She was, as he had to confess to himself again, just like anybody else.

He went over to where Mrs. Lorraine was, and sat down beside her. Sheila, remembering his injunctions, felt bound to leave him there; and as she rose to speak to Mrs. Kavanagh, who was standing by, that lady came and begged her to sing a Highland song. By this time, Lavender had succeeded in interesting his companion about something or other; and neither of them noticed that Sheila had gone to the piano, attended by the young politician who had taken her in to dinner. Nor did they interrupt their talk merely because someone played a few bars of prelude. But what was this that suddenly startled Lavender to the heart, causing him to look up with surprise? He had not heard the air since he was in Borva, and when Sheila sang

"Hark! hark, the horn
On mountain breezes borne!

Awake, it is morn ;
Awake, Monaltrie !"

all sorts of reminiscences came rushing in upon him. How often had he heard that wild story of Monaltrie's flight sung in the small chamber over the sea, with a sound of the waves outside, and a scent of sea-weed coming in at the door and the windows ! It was from the shores of Borva that young Monaltrie must have fled. It must have been in Borva that his sweetheart sat in her bower and sang, the burden of all her singing being "Return, Monaltrie !" And then as Sheila sang now, making the monotonous and plaintive air wild and strange—

" What cries of wild despair
Awake the sultry air ?
Frenzied with anxious care,
She seeks Monaltrie !"

he heard no more of the song. He was thinking of bygone days in Borva, and of old Mackenzie living in his lonely house there. When Sheila had finished singing, he looked at her, and it seemed to him that she was still that wonderful Princess whom he had wooed on the shores of the Atlantic. And if those people did not see her as he saw her, ought he to be disappointed because of their blindness ?

But if they saw nothing mystic or wonderful

about Sheila, they at all events were considerably surprised by the strange sort of music she sang. It was not of a sort commonly heard in a London drawing-room. The pathos of its minor chords, its abrupt intervals, startling and wild in their effect, and the slowly subsiding wail in which it closed, did not much resemble the ordinary drawing-room "piece." Here, at least, Sheila had produced an impression; and presently there was a heap of people round the piano, expressing their admiration, asking questions, and begging her to continue. But she rose. She would rather not sing just then. Whereupon Lavender came out to her, and said—

"Sheila, won't you sing that wild one about the farewell—that has the sound of the pipes in it, you know?"

"Oh, yes," she said, directly.

Lavender went back to his companion.

"She is very obedient to you," said Mrs. Lorraine, with a smile.

"She is a very good girl," he said.

"*Oh! soft be thy slumbers, by Tigh-na-linne's waters;*
Thy late-wake was sung by Macdiarmid's fair daughters;
But far in Lochaber the true heart was weeping
Whose hopes are entombed in the grave where thou'rt sleeping."

—so Sheila sang ; and it seemed to the people that this ballad was even more strange than its predecessor. When the song was over, Sheila seemed rather anxious to get out of the crowd, and indeed, walked away into the conservatory to have a look at the flowers.

Yes, Lavender had to confess to himself, Sheila was just like anybody else in this drawing-room. His Sea-Princess had produced no startling impression. He forgot that he had just been teaching her the necessity of observing the ways and customs of the people around her, so that she might avoid singularity.

On one point, at least, she was resolved she would attend to his counsels—she would not make him ridiculous by any show of affection before the eyes of strangers. She did not go near him the whole evening. She remained for the most part in that half-conservatory, half anteroom at the end of the drawing-room ; and when anyone talked to her she answered, and when she was left alone she turned to the flowers. All this time, however, she could observe that Lavender and Mrs. Lorraine were very much engrossed in their conversation ; that she seemed very much amused, and he at times a trifle embarrassed ; and that both of them had apparently forgotten her existence. Mrs. Kavanagh was

continually coming to Sheila, and trying to coax her back into the larger room; but in vain. She would rather not sing any more that night. She liked to look at flowers. She was not tired at all; and she had already seen those wonderful photographs about which everybody was talking.

"Well, Sheila, how did you enjoy yourself?" said her husband, as they were driving home.

"I wish Mr. Ingram had been there," said Sheila.

"Ingram! he would not have stopped in the place five minutes, unless he could play the part of Diogenes, and say rude things to everybody all round. Were you at all dull?"

"A little."

"Didn't somebody look after you?"

"Oh yes, many persons were very kind. But —but——"

"Well?"

"Nobody seemed to be better off than myself. They all seemed to be wanting something to do; and I am sure they were all very glad to come away."

"No, no, no, Sheila. That is only your fancy. You were not much interested, that is evident; but you will get on better when you know more of the people. You were a stranger—that is

what disappointed you ; but you will not always be a stranger."

Sheila did not answer. Perhaps she contemplated with no great hope or longing the possibility of her coming to like such a method of getting through an evening. At all events, she looked forward with no great pleasure to the chance of her having to become friends with Mrs. Lorraine. All the way home, Sheila was examining her own heart, to try to discover why such bitter feelings should be there. Surely that American girl was honest: there was honesty in her grey eyes. She had been most kind to Sheila herself. And was there not at times—when she abandoned the ways and speech of a woman of the world—a singular coy fascination about her, that any man might be excused for yielding to, even as any woman might yield to it? Sheila fought with herself; and resolved that she would cast forth from her heart those harsh fancies and indignant feelings that seemed to have established themselves there. She would *not* hate Mrs. Lorraine.

As for Lavender, what was he thinking of, now that he and his young wife were driving home from their first experiment in society? He had to confess to a certain sense of failure. His dreams had not been realized. Everyone who

had spoken to him had conveyed to him, as freely as good manners would admit, their congratulations, and their praises of his wife. But the impressive scenes he had been forecasting were out of the question. There was a little curiosity about her, on the part of those who knew her story; and that was all. Sheila bore herself very well. She made no blunders. She had a good presence; she sang well; and everyone could see that she was handsome, gentle, and honest. Surely, he argued with himself, that ought to content the most exacting. But, in spite of all argument, he was not quite satisfied. He did not regret that he had sacrificed his liberty in a freak of romance; he did not even regard the fact of a man in his position having dared to marry a penniless girl as anything very meritorious or heroic; but he had hoped that the dramatic circumstances of the case would be duly recognized by his friends, and that Sheila would be an object of interest, and wonder, and talk in an whole series of social circles. The result of his adventure, he now saw, was different. There was only one married man the more in London: and London was not disposed to pay any particular heed to the circumstance.

CHAPTER IV.

BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON.

If Frank Lavender had been told that his love for his wife was in danger of waning, he would have laughed the suggestion to scorn. He was as fond of her and as proud of her as ever. Who knew as well as himself the tenderness of her heart, the proud sensitiveness of her conscience, the generosity of self-sacrifice she was always ready to bestow; and was he likely to become blind, so that he should fail to see how fair, and fearless, and handsome she was? Nothing was too good for her. He was recklessly extravagant in buying her jewellery, dresses, and what not; and she was abundantly grateful. Nor had he relinquished those wild dreams of future renown which was to be consecrated all to her. He would make the name and the fame of Sheila known to all the world, not for his own sake, but that she might be pleased. He had

been disappointed, it is true, in his fancies about the impression she would produce on his friends; but what a trifle was that! The folly of those fancies was his own. For the rest, he was glad that Sheila was not so different from the other women whom he knew. He hit upon the profound reflection, as he sat alone in his studio, that a man's wife, like his costume, should not be so remarkable as to attract attention. The perfection of dress was that you should be unconscious of its presence: might that not be so with marriage? After all, it was better that he had not bound himself to lug about a lion whenever he visited people's houses.

Still, there was something. He found himself a good deal alone. Sheila did not seem to care much for going into society; and although he did not greatly like the notion of going by himself, nevertheless one had certain duties towards one's friends to perform. She did not even care to go down to the Park of a forenoon. She always professed her readiness to go; but he fancied it was a trifle tiresome for her; and so, when there was nothing particular going on in the studio, he would walk down through Kensington Gardens himself, and have a chat with some friends, followed generally by luncheon with this or the other party of them. Sheila had

been taught that she ought not to come so frequently to that studio. Bras would not lie quiet. Moreover, if dealers or other strangers should come in, would they not take her for a model? So Sheila stayed at home; and Mr. Lavender, after having dressed with care in the morning—with very singular care, indeed, considering that he was going to his work—used to go down to his studio to smoke a cigarette. The chances were that he was not in a humour for working. Those dreams of a great renown which he was to win for Sheila's sake were too vast, remote, and impalpable to be fastened down to any square bit of canvas. He would sit down in an easy-chair, and kick his heels on the floor for a time, watching perhaps the sunlight come in through the upper part of the windows and paint yellow squares on the opposite wall. Then he would go out and lock the door behind him; leaving no message whatever for those crowds of importunate dealers who, as Sheila fancied, were besieging him with offers in one hand and purses of gold in the other.

One morning, after she had been in-doors for two or three days, and had grown hopelessly tired of the monotony of watching that sunlit square, she was filled with an unconquerable longing to go away, for however brief a space,

from the sight of houses. The morning was sweet, and clear, and bright; white clouds were slowly crossing a fair blue sky; and a fresh and cool breeze was blowing in at the open French windows.

"Bras," she said, going down stairs, and out into the small garden, "we are going into the country."

The great deerhound seemed to know; and rose and came to her with great gravity, while she clasped on the leash. He was no frisky animal to show his delight by yelping and gambolling; but he laid his long nose in her hand, and slowly wagged the down-drooping curve of his shaggy tail; and then he placidly walked by her side up into the hall, where he stood awaiting her.

She would go along and beg of her husband to leave his work for a day, and go with her for a walk down to Richmond Park. She had often heard Mr. Ingram speak of walking down; and she remembered that much of the road was pretty. Why should not her husband have one holiday?

"It is such a shame," she had said to him that morning, as he left, "that you will be going into that gloomy place, with its bare walls and chairs, and the windows so that you cannot see out of them."

"I must get some work done somehow, Sheila," he said; although he did not tell her that he had not finished a picture since his marriage.

"I wish I could do some of it for you," she said.

"You! All the work you're good for is catching fish, and feeding ducks, and hauling up sails. Why don't you come down and feed the ducks in the Serpentine?"

"I should like to do that," she answered. "I will go any day with you."

"Well," he said, "you see, I don't know until I get along to the studio whether I can get away for the forenoon; and then, if I were to come back here, you would have little or no time to dress. Good-bye, Sheila."

"Good-bye," she had said to him, giving up the Serpentine without much regret.

But the forenoon had turned out so delightful that she thought she would go along to the studio, and hale him out of that gaunt and dingy apartment. She should take him away from town; therefore she might put on that rough blue dress in which she used to go boating in Loch Roag. She had lately smartened it up a bit with some white braid; and she hoped he would approve.

Did the big hound know the dress? He rubbed his head against her arm and hand when she came down; and looked up, and whined almost inaudibly.

"You are going out, Bras; and you must be a good dog, and not try to go after the deer. Then I will send a very good story of you to Mairi; and when she comes to London, after the harvest is over, she will bring you a present from the Lewis, and you will be very proud."

She went out into the square, and was perhaps a little glad to get away from it, as she was not sure of the blue dress and the small hat with its sea-gull's feather being precisely the costume she ought to wear. When she got into the Uxbridge Road, she breathed more freely; and in the lightness of her heart she continued her conversation with Bras, giving that attentive animal a vast amount of information, partly in English, partly in Gaelic, which he only answered by a low whine or a shake of his shaggy head.

But these confidences were suddenly interrupted. She had got down to Addison Terrace, and was contentedly looking at the trees and chatting to the dog, when by accident her eye happened to light on a brougham that was driving past. In it—she beheld them both clearly for a brief second—were her husband and

Mrs. Lorraine, engaged in conversation, so that neither of them saw her. Sheila stood on the pavement for a couple of minutes, absolutely bewildered. All sorts of wild fancies and recollections came crowding in upon her—reasons why her husband was unwilling that she should visit his studio—why Mrs. Lorraine never called on her—and so forth, and so forth. She did not know what to think for a time; but presently all this tumult was stilled, and she had bravely resolved her doubts and made up her mind as to what she should do. She could not suspect her husband—that was the one sweet security to which she clung. He had made use of no duplicity; if there was anything wrong—and perhaps she committed a great injustice in even imagining such a possibility—he, at least, was certainly not in fault. And if this Mrs. Lorraine should amuse him and interest him, who could grudge him this break in the monotony of his work? Sheila knew that she herself disliked going to those fashionable gatherings to which Mrs. Lorraine went, and to which Lavender had been accustomed to go before he was married. How could she expect him to give up all his old habits and pleasures for her sake? She would be more reasonable and more generous. It was her own fault that she was not a better

companion for him; and was it for her, then, to think hardly of him because he went to the Park with a friend instead of going alone?

Yet there was a great bitterness and grief in her heart as she turned and walked on. She spoke no more to the deerhound by her side. There seemed to be less sunlight in the air; and the people and carriages passing were hardly so busy and cheerful and interesting as they had been. But all the same, she would go to Richmond Park, and by herself: for what was the use of calling in at the studio; and how could she go back home and sit in the house, knowing that her husband was away at some flower-show, or morning concert, or some such thing, with that young American lady?

She knew no other road to Richmond than that by which they had driven shortly after her arrival in London; and so it was that she went down and over Hammersmith Bridge, and round by Mortlake, and so on by East Sheen. The road seemed terribly long. She was an excellent walker, and, in ordinary circumstances, would have done the distance without fatigue; but when at length she saw the gates of the Park before her, she was at once exceedingly tired, and almost faint from hunger. Here was the hotel in which they had dined; should she

enter? The place seemed very grand and forbidding: she had scarcely even looked at it as she went up the steps with her husband by her side. However, she would venture; and accordingly she went up and into the vestibule, looking rather timidly about. A young gentleman, apparently not a waiter, approached her, and seemed to wait for her to speak. It was a terrible moment. What was she to ask for, and could she ask it of this young man? Fortunately he spoke first, and asked her if she wished to go into the coffee-room, and if she expected anyone.

"No, I do not expect anyone," she said, and she knew that he would perceive the peculiarity of her accent; "but if you will be kind enough to tell me where I may have a biscuit——"

It occurred to her that to go into the Star and Garter for a biscuit was absurd; and she added, wildly—

"——or anything to eat."

The young man obviously regarded her with some surprise: but he was very courteous, and showed her into the coffee-room, and called a waiter to her. Moreover, he gave permission for Bras to be admitted into the room, Sheila promising that he would lie under the table and

not budge an inch. Then she looked round. There were only three persons in the room; one an old lady seated by herself in a far corner, the other two being a couple of young folks too much engrossed with each other to mind anyone else. She began to feel more at home. The waiter suggested various things for lunch; and she made her choice of something cold. Then she mustered up courage to ask for a glass of sherry. How she would have enjoyed all this as a story to tell to her husband but for that incident of the morning! She would have gloried in her outward bravery; and made him smile with a description of her inward terror. She would have written about it to the old King of Borva, and bid him consider how she had been transformed, and what strange scenes Bras was now witnessing. But all that was over. She felt as if she could no longer ask her husband to be amused by her childish experiences; and as for writing to her father, she dared not write to him in her present mood. Perhaps some happier time would come. Sheila paid her bill. She had heard her husband and Mr. Ingram talk about tipping waiters, and knew that she ought to give something to the man who had attended on her. But how much? He was a very august-looking person, with formally-cut whiskers, and a severe expression of

face. When he had brought back the change to her she timidly selected a half-crown, and offered it to him. There was a little glance of surprise; she feared she had not given him enough. Then he said "Thank you!" in a vague and distant fashion, and she was sure she had not given him enough. But it was too late. Bras was summoned from beneath the table; and again she went out into the fresh air.

"Oh, my good dog!" she said to him, as they together walked up to the gates and into the Park, "this is a very extravagant country. You have to pay half-a-crown to a servant for bringing you a piece of cold pie, and then he looks as if he was not paid enough. And Duncan, who will do everything about the house, and will give us all our dinners, it is only a pound a week he will get, and Scarlett has to be kept out of that. And wouldn't you like to see poor old Scarlett again?"

Bras whined as if he understood every word.

"I suppose now she is hanging out the washing on the gooseberry bushes, and you know the song she always used to sing then? Don't you know that Scarlett carried me about, long before you were born, for you are a mere infant compared with me, and she used to sing to me—

'Ged' bheirte mi' bho'n bhas so,
Mho Sheila bheag ðg' !'

And that is what she is singing just now; and Mairi she is bringing the things out of the washing-house. Papa he is over in Stornoway this morning, arranging his accounts with the people there, and perhaps he is down at the quay, looking at the *Clansman*, and wondering when she is to bring me into the harbour. Ah—h! You bad dog."

Bras had forgotten to listen to his mistress in the excitement of seeing in the distance a large herd of deer under certain trees. She felt by the leash that he was trembling in every limb with expectation, and straining hard on the collar. Again and again she admonished him—in vain; until she had at last to drag him away down the hill, putting a small plantation between him and the herd. Here she found a large, umbrageous chesnut-tree, with a wooden seat round its trunk, and so she sat down in the green twilight of the leaves, while Bras came and put his head in her lap. Out beyond the shadow of the tree all the world lay bathed in sunlight; and a great silence brooded over the long undulations of the Park, where not a human being was in sight. How strange it was, she fell to thinking, that within a short distance there were millions of men and

women, while here she was absolutely alone. Did they not care, then, for the sunlight, and the trees, and the sweet air? Were they so wrapped up in those social observances that seemed to her so barren of interest?

"They have a beautiful country here," she said, talking in a rambling and wistful way to Bras, and scarcely noticing the eager light in his eyes, as if he were trying to understand. "They have no rain, and no fog; almost always blue skies, and the clouds high up and far away. And the beautiful trees they have too—you never saw anything like that in the Lewis—not even at Stornoway. And the people are so rich, and beautiful in their dress, and all the day they have only to think how to enjoy themselves, and what new amusement is for the morrow. But I think they are tired of having nothing to do—or perhaps, you know, they are tired because they have nothing to fight against—no hard weather, and hunger, and poverty. They do not care for each other as they would if they were working on the same farm, and trying to save up for the winter; or if they were going out to the fishing, and very glad to come home again from Caithness to find all the old people very well, and the young ones ready for a dance, and a dram, and much joking and laughing and telling of stories.

It is a very great difference there will be in the people—very great."

She rose, and looked wistfully around her, and then turned with a sigh to make her way to the gates. It was with no especial sort of gladness that she thought of returning home. Here, in the great stillness, she had been able to dream of the far island which she knew, and to fancy herself for a few minutes there; now she was going back to the dreary monotony of her life in that square, and to the doubts and anxieties which had been suggested to her in the morning. The world she was about to enter once more seemed so much less homely, so much less full of interest and purpose, than that other and distant world she had been wistfully regarding for a time. The people around her had neither the joys nor the sorrows with which she had been taught to sympathise. Their cares seemed to her to be exaggerations of trifles; she could feel no pity for them, their satisfaction was derived from sources unintelligible to her. And the social atmosphere around her seemed still, and close, and suffocating; so that she was like to cry out at times for one breath of God's clear wind—for a shaft of lightning even—to cut through the sultry and drowsy sameness of her life.

She had almost forgotten the dog by her side. While sitting under the chestnut she had carelessly and loosely wound the leash round his neck, in the semblance of a collar; and when she rose and came away, she let the dog walk by her side without undoing the leash and taking proper charge of him. She was thinking of far other things, indeed, when she was startled by some one calling her—

"Look out, Miss, or you'll have your dog shot!"

She turned, and caught a glimpse of that which sent a thrill of terror to her heart. Bras had sneaked off from her side—had trotted lightly over the breckans, and was now in full chase of a herd of deer which were flying down the slope on the other side of the plantation. He rushed now at one, now at another; the very number of chances presented to him proving the safety of the whole herd. But as Sheila, with a swift flight that would have astonished most townbred girls, followed the wild chase and came to the crest of the slope, she could see that the hound had at length singled out a particular deer—a fine buck with handsome horns, that was making straight for the foot of the valley. The herd, that had been much scattered, were now drawing together again, though checking

nothing of their speed; but this single buck had been driven from his companions, and was doing his utmost to escape from the fangs of the powerful animal behind him.

What could she do but run wildly and breathlessly on? The dog was now far beyond the reach of her voice. She had no whistle. All sorts of fearful anticipations rushed in on her mind—the most prominent of all being the anger of her father if Bras were shot. How could she go back to Borva with such a tale; and how could she live in London without this companion who had come with her from the far north? Then what terrible things were connected with the killing of deer in a Royal Park? She remembered vaguely what Mr. Ingram and her husband had been saying; and while these things were crowding in upon her, she felt her strength beginning to fail, while both the dog and the deer had disappeared altogether from sight.

Strange, too, that in the midst of her fatigue and fright, while she still managed to struggle on, with a sharp pain at her heart and a sort of mist before her eyes, she had a vague consciousness that her husband would be vexed, not by the conduct or the fate of Bras, but by her being the heroine of so mad an adventure. She

knew that he wished her to be serious, and subdued, and proper, like the ladies whom she met; while an evil destiny seemed to dog her footsteps and precipitate her into all sorts of erratic mishaps and "scenes." However, this adventure was likely soon to have an end.

She could go no further. Whatever had become of Bras, it was in vain for her to think of pursuing him. When she at length reached a broad and smooth road leading through the pasture, she could only stand still and press her two hands over her heart, while her head seemed giddy, and she did not see two men who had been standing on the road close by until they came up and addressed her.

Then she started, and looked round; finding before her two men who were apparently labourers of some sort, one of them having a shovel over his shoulder.

"Beg your pardon, Miss, but wur that your dawg?"

"Yes," she said, eagerly. "Could you get it? Did you see him go by? Do you know where he is?"

"Me and my mate saw him go by, sure enough; but as for getting him—why, the keepers 'll have shot him by this time."

"Oh no!" cried Sheila, almost in tears, "they

must not shoot him. It was my fault. I will pay them for all the harm he has done. Can't you tell me which way he will go past?"

"I don't think, Miss," said the spokesman, quite respectfully, "as you can go much furder. If you would sit down, and rest yourself, and keep an eye on this 'ere shovel, me and my mate will have a hunt arter the dawg."

Sheila not only accepted the offer gratefully, but promised to give them all the money she had if only they would bring back the dog unharmed. Then the men went their way.

It was a hard thing to wait here, in the greatest doubt and uncertainty, while the afternoon was visibly waning. She began to grow afraid. Perhaps the men had stolen the dog, and left her with this shovel as a blind. Her husband must have come home; and would be astonished and perplexed by her absence. Surely he would have the sense to dine by himself, instead of waiting for her; and she reflected with some glimpse of satisfaction, that she had left everything connected with dinner properly arranged, so that he should have nothing to grumble at.

Her reverie was interrupted by the sound of footsteps on the grass behind: and she turned quickly, to find the two men approaching her,

one of them leading the captive Bras by the leash. Sheila sprang to her feet with a great gladness. She did not care even to accuse the culprit, whose consciousness of guilt was evident in his look and in the droop of his tail. Bras did not once turn his eyes to his mistress. He hung down his head, while he panted rapidly, and she fancied she saw some smearing of blood on his tongue and on the side of his jaw. Her fears on this head were speedily confirmed.

"I think, Miss, as you'd better take him out o' the Park as soon as maybee; for he's got a deer killed close by the Robin Hood Gate, in the trees there, and if the keepers happen on it afore you leave the Park, you'll get into trouble."

"Oh, thank you," said Sheila, retaining her composure bravely, but with a terrible sinking of the heart; "and how can I get to the nearest railway station?"

"You're going to London, Miss?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose the nearest is Richmond; but it would be quieter for you, don't you see, Miss, if you was to go along to the Roehampton Gate and go to Barnes."

"Will you show me the gate?" said Sheila, choosing the quieter route at once.

But the men themselves did not at all like the look of accompanying her and this dog through the Park. Had they not already condoned a felony, or done something equally dreadful, in handing to her a dog that had been found keeping watch and ward over a slain buck? They showed her the road to the Roehampton Gate; and then they paused before continuing on their journey.

The pause meant money. Sheila took out her purse. There were three sovereigns and some silver in it; and the entire sum, in fulfilment of her promise, she held out to him who had so far conducted the negotiations.

Both men looked frightened. It was quite clear that either good feeling or some indefinite fear of being implicated in the killing of the deer caused them to regard this big bribe as something they could not meddle with; and at length, after a pause of a second or two, the spokesman said, with great hesitation—

"Well, Miss, you've kep' your word; but me and my mate—well, if so be as it's the same to you, 'd rather have summut to drink your health——"

"Do you think it is too much?"

The man looked at his neighbour, who nodded.

"It was only for ketchin' of a dawg, Miss,

don't you see?" he remarked, slowly, as if to impress upon her that they had nothing whatever to do with the deer.

"Will you take this, then?" and she offered them half-a-crown each.

Their faces lightened considerably; they took the money; and, with a formal expression of thanks, moved off—but not before they had taken a glance round to see that no one had been a witness of this interview.

And so Sheila had to walk away by herself, knowing that she had been guilty of a dreadful offence, and that at any moment she might be arrested by the officers of the law. What would the old King of Borva say if he saw his only daughter in the hands of two policemen; and would not all Mr. Lavender's fastidious and talkative and wondering friends pass about the newspaper report of her trial and conviction! A man was approaching her. As he drew near her heart failed her; for might not this be the mysterious George Ranger himself, about whom her husband and Mr. Ingram had been talking? Should she drop on her knees at once, and confess her sins, and beg him to let her off? If Duncan were with her, or Mairi, or even old Scarlett Macdonald, she would not have cared so much: but it seemed so terrible to meet this man alone.

However, as he drew near he did not seem a fierce person. He was an old gentleman, with voluminous white hair, who was dressed all in black, and carried an umbrella on this warm and bright afternoon. He regarded her and the dog in a distant and contemplative fashion, as though he would probably try to remember them some time after he had really seen them; and then he passed on. Sheila began to breathe more freely. Moreover, here was the gate; and once she was in the high road, who could say anything to her? Tired as she was, she still walked rapidly on; and in due time, having had to ask the way once or twice, she found herself at Barnes station.

By and by the train came in; Bras was committed to the care of the guard; and she found herself alone in a railway carriage, for the first time in her life. Her husband had told her that whenever she felt uncertain of her whereabouts, if in the country, she was to ask for the nearest station and get a train to London; if in town, she was to get into a cab and give the driver her address. And, indeed, Sheila had been so much agitated and perplexed during this afternoon, that she acted in a sort of mechanical fashion, and really escaped the nervousness which otherwise would have attended the novel experience of

purchasing a ticket and of arranging about the carriage of a dog in the break-van. Even now, when she found herself travelling alone, and shortly to arrive at a part of London she had never seen, her crowding thoughts and fancies were not about her own situation, but about the reception she should receive from her husband. Would he be vexed with her? Or pity her? Had he called, with Mrs. Lorraine, to take her somewhere, and found her gone? Had he brought home some bachelor friends to dinner, and been chagrined to find her not in the house?

It was getting dusk when the slow four-wheeler approached Sheila's home. The hour for dinner had long gone by. Perhaps her husband had gone away somewhere looking for her, and she would find the house empty.

But Frank Lavender came to meet his wife in the hall, and said—

"Where have you been?"

She could not tell whether there was anger or kindness in his voice; and she could not well see his face. She took his hand, and went into the dining-room, which was also in dusk, and, standing there, told him all her story.

"By Jove!" he said, impatiently. "I'll go and thrash that dog within an inch of its life."

"No," she said, drawing herself up; and for

one brief second—could he but have seen her face—there was a touch of old Mackenzie's pride and firmness about the ordinarily gentle lips. It was but for a second. She cast down her eyes, and said, meekly, "I hope you won't do that, Frank. The dog is not to blame. It was my fault."

"Well, really, Sheila," he said, "don't you think you are a little thoughtless? I wish you would try to act as other women act, instead of constantly putting yourself and me into the most awkward positions. Suppose I had brought anyone home to dinner, now? And what am I to say to Ingram?—for of course I went direct to his lodgings when I discovered you were nowhere to be found. I fancied some mad freak had taken you there; and I should not have been surprised. Do you know who was in the hall when I came in this afternoon?"

"No," said Sheila.

"Why, that wretched old hag who keeps the fruit-stall. And it seems you gave her and all her family tea and cake in the kitchen last night."

It was certainly not the expense of these charities that he objected to. He was himself recklessly generous in such things. He would have given a sovereign where Sheila gave a shilling; but that was a different matter from

having his wife almost associate with such people.

"She is a poor old woman," said Sheila, humbly.

"A poor old woman!" he said. "I have no doubt she is a lying old thief, who would take an umbrella or a coat if only she could get the chance. It is really too bad, Sheila, your having all those persons about me, and demeaning yourself by attending on them. What must the servants think of you!"

"I do not heed what any servants think of me," she said.

She was now standing erect, with her face quite calm.

"Apparently not!" he said, "or you would not go and make yourself ridiculous before them."

Sheila hesitated for a moment, as if she did not understand; and then she said, as calmly as before, but with a touch of indignation about the proud and beautiful lips—

"And if I make myself ridiculous by attending to poor people, it is not my husband who should tell me so."

She turned and walked out, and he was too surprised to follow her. She went upstairs to her own room, locked herself in, and threw herself on the bed. And then all the bitterness of her heart rose up as if in a flood—not against

him, but against the country in which he lived, and the society which had contaminated him, and the ways and habits that seemed to create a barrier between herself and him, so that she was almost a stranger to him, and incapable of becoming anything else. It was a fault that she should interest herself in the unfortunate creatures round about her; that she should talk to them as if they were human beings like herself, and have a great sympathy with their small hopes and aims: but she would not have been led into such a fault if she had cultivated from her infancy upwards a consistent self-indulgence, making herself the centre of a world of mean desires and petty gratifications. And then she thought of the old and beautiful days up in the Lewis, where the young English stranger seemed to approve of her simple ways and her charitable work; and where she was taught to believe that, in order to please him, she had only to continue to be what she was then. There was no great gulf of time between that period and this; but what had not happened in the interval! She had not changed—at least she hoped she had not changed. She loved her husband with her whole heart and soul; her devotion was as true and constant as she herself could have wished it to be when she dreamed

of the duties of a wife in the days of her maidenhood. But all around her was changed. She had no longer the old freedom—the old delight in living from day to day—the active work, and the enjoyment of seeing where she could help, and how she could help, the people around her. When, as if by the same sort of instinct that makes a wild animal retain in captivity the habits which were necessary to its existence when it lived in freedom, she began to find out the circumstances of such unfortunate people as were in her neighbourhood, some little solace was given to her; but these people were not friends to her, as the poor folk of Borvabost had been. She knew, too, that her husband would be displeased if he found her talking with a washerwoman over the poor creature's family matters, or even advising one of her own servants about the disposal of her wages; so that, while she concealed nothing from him, these things nevertheless had to be done exclusively in his absence. And was she, in so doing, really making herself ridiculous? Did he consider her ridiculous? Or was it not merely the fatal influences of the indolent society in which he lived that had poisoned his mind, and drawn him away from her as though into another world?

Alas! if he were in that other world, was not

she quite alone? What companionship was there possible between her and the people in this new and strange land into which she had ventured? As she lay on the bed, with her head hidden down in the darkness, the pathetic wail of the captive Jews seemed to come and go through the bitterness of her thoughts, like some mournful refrain: "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*" She almost heard the words; and the reply that rose up to her heart was a great yearning to go back to her own land, so that her eyes were filled with tears, in thinking of it, and she lay and sobbed there, in the dusk. Would not the old man, living all by himself in that lonely island, be glad to see his little girl back again in the old house? and she would sing to him as she used to sing, not as she had been singing to those people whom her husband knew. "*For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*" And she had sung in the strange land, among the strange people, with her heart breaking with thoughts of the sea, and the hills, and the rude and sweet and simple ways of the old bygone life she had left behind her.

"Sheila!"

She thought it was her father calling to her, and she rose with a cry of joy. For one wild moment she fancied that outside were all the people she knew—Duncan, and Scarlett, and Mairi—and that she was once more at home, with the sea all around her, and the salt, cold air.

"Sheila, I want to speak to you."

It was her husband. She went to the door, opened it, and stood there, penitent and with downcast face.

"Come, you must not be silly," he said, with some kindness in his voice. "You have had no dinner. You must be hungry."

"I do not care for any—there is no use troubling the servants when I would rather lie down," she said.

"The servants! You surely don't take so seriously what I said about them, Sheila? Of course, you don't need to care what the servants think. And in any case they have to bring up dinner for me, so you may as well come and try."

"Have you not had dinner?" she said, timidly.

"Do you think I could sit down and eat with a notion that you might have tumbled into the Thames, or been kidnapped, or something?"

"I am very sorry," she said, in a low voice;

and in the gloom he felt his hand taken and carried to her lips. Then they went down-stairs into the dining-room, which was now lit up by a blaze of gas and candles.

During dinner, of course, no very confidential talking was possible; and, indeed, Sheila had plenty to tell of her adventures at Richmond. Lavender was now in a more amiable mood; and was disposed to look upon the killing of the roebuck as rather a good joke. He complimented Sheila on her good sense in having gone in to the Star and Garter for lunch; and altogether something like better relations was established between them.

But when dinner was finally over, and the servants dismissed, Lavender placed Sheila's easy chair for her as usual, drew his own near hers, and lit a cigarette.

"Now, tell me, Sheila," he said, "were you really vexed with me when you went up-stairs and locked yourself in your room? Did you think I meant to displease you, or say anything harsh to you?"

"No, not any of those things," she said, calmly; "I wished to be alone—to think over what had happened. And I was grieved by what you said; for I think you cannot help looking at many things not as I will look at

them—that is all. It is my bringing up in the Highlands, perhaps."

"Do you know, Sheila, it sometimes occurs to me that you are not quite comfortable here; and I can't make out what is the matter! I think you have a perverse fancy that you are different from the people you meet, and that you cannot be like them, and all that sort of thing. Now, dear, that is only a fancy. There need be no difference, if only you will take a little trouble."

"Oh, Frank!" she said, going over and putting her hand on his shoulder, "I cannot take that trouble! I cannot try to be like those people. And I see a great difference in you since you have come back to London, and you are getting to be like them, and say the things they say. If I could only see you, my own darling, up in the Lewis again, with rough clothes on, and a gun in your hand, I should be happy. You were yourself up there, when you were helping us in the boat, or when you were bringing home the salmon, or when we were all together at night in the little parlour, you know——"

"My dear, don't get so excited. Now sit down, and I will tell you all about it. You seem to have the notion that people lose all their finer sentiments simply because they don't, in

society's burst into raptures over them. You mustn't imagine all those people are selfish and callous merely because they preserve a decent reticence. To tell you the truth, that constant profession of noble feelings you would like to see would have something of ostentation about it."

Sheila only sighed.

"I do not wish them to be altered," she said, by and by, with her eyes grown pensive; "all I know is that I could not live the same life. And you—you seemed to be happier up in the Highlands than you have ever been since."

"Well, you see, a man ought to be happy when he is enjoying a holiday in the country, along with the girl he is engaged to. But if I had lived all my life killing salmon and shooting wild duck, I should have grown up an ignorant boor, with no more sense of——"

He stopped; for he saw that the girl was thinking of her father.

"Well, look here, Sheila. You see how you are placed—how we are placed, rather. Wouldn't it be more sensible to get to understand those people you look askance at, and establish better relations with them, since you have got to live among them? I can't help thinking you are too much alone, and you

can't expect me to stay in the house always with you. A husband and wife cannot be continually in each other's company, unless they want to grow heartily tired of each other. Now if you would only lay aside those suspicions of yours, you would find the people just as honest, and generous, and friendly as any other sort of people you ever met, although they don't happen to be fond of expressing their goodness in their talk."

"I have tried, dear—I will try again," said Sheila.

She resolved that she would go down and visit Mrs. Kavanagh next day, and try to be interested in the talk of such people as might be there. She would bring away some story about this or the other fashionable woman or noble lord, just to show her husband that she was doing her best to learn. She would drive patiently round the park in that close little brougham, and listen attentively to the moralities of Marcus Aurelius. She would make an appointment to go with Mrs. Lorraine to a morning concert. All these things, and many more, Sheila silently vowed to herself she would do, while her husband sat and expounded to her his theories of the obligations which society demanded of its members.

But her plans were suddenly broken asunder.

"I met Mrs. Lorraine accidentally to-day," he said.

It was his first mention of the young American lady. Sheila sat in mute expectation.

"She always asks very kindly after you."

"She is very good."

He did not say, however, that Mrs. Lorraine had more than once made distinct propositions, when in his company, that they should call in for Sheila, and take her out for a drive, or to a flower-show, or some such place, while Lavender had always some excuse ready.

"She is going to Brighton to-morrow, and she was wondering whether you would care to run down for a day or two."

"With her?" said Sheila, recoiling from such a proposal instinctively.

"Of course not. I should go. And then at last, you know, you would see the sea, about which you have been dreaming for ever so long."

The sea! There was a magic in the very word that could almost at any moment summon tears into her eyes. Of course, she accepted right gladly. If her husband's duties were so pressing that the long-talked-of journey to Lewis and Borva had to be repeatedly and indefinitely postponed, here at least would be a chance of looking again at the sea—of drinking in the

freshness and light and colour of it—of renewing her old and intimate friendship with it, that had been broken off for so long by her stay in this city of perpetual houses and still sunshine.

"You can tell her you will go when you see her to-night at Lady Mary's. By the way, isn't it time for you to begin to dress?"

"Oh, Lady Mary's," repeated Sheila, mechanically, who had forgotten all about her engagements for that evening.

"Perhaps you are too tired to go," said her husband.

She was a little tired, in truth. But surely, just after her promises, spoken and unspoken, some little effort was demanded of her; so she bravely went to dress, and in about three-quarters of an hour was ready to drive down to Curzon Street. Her husband had never seen her look so pleased before in going out to any party. He flattered himself that his lecture had done her good. There was fair common-sense in what he had said; and although, doubtless, a girl's romanticism was a pretty thing, it would have to yield to the actual requirements of life. In time he should educate Sheila.

But he did not know what brightened the girl's face all that night, and put a new life into the beautiful eyes, so that even those who knew

her best were struck by her singular beauty. It was the sea that was colouring Sheila's eyes. The people around her, the glare of the candles, the hum of talking, and the motion of certain groups dancing over there in the middle of the throng—all were faint and visionary; for she was busily wondering what the sea would be like the next morning, and what strange fancies would strike her when once more she walked on sand, and heard the roar of waves. That, indeed, was the sound that was present in her ears, while the music played, and the people murmured around her. Mrs. Lorraine talked to her, and was surprised and amused to notice the eager fashion in which the girl spoke of their journey of the next day. The gentleman who took her in to supper found himself catechised about Brighton in a manner which afforded him more occupation than enjoyment. And when Sheila drove away from the house, at two in the morning, she declared to her husband that she had enjoyed herself extremely, and he was glad to hear it; and she was particularly kind to himself in getting him his slippers, and fetching him that final cigarette which he always had on reaching home; and then she went off to bed to dream of ships, and flying clouds, and cold winds, and a great and beautiful blue plain of waves.

CHAPTER V.

DEEPER AND DEEPER.

NEXT morning Sheila was busy with her preparations for departure when she heard a hansom drive up. She looked from the window, and saw Mr. Ingram step out; and, before he had time to cross the pavement, she had run round and opened the door, and stood at the top of the steps to receive him. How often had her husband cautioned her not to forget herself in this monstrous fashion!

"Did you think I had run away? Have you come to see me?" she said, with a bright, roseate gladness on her face which reminded him of many a pleasant morning in Borva.

"I did not think you had run away, for you see I have brought you some flowers," he said; but there was a sort of blush in the sallow face, and perhaps the girl had some quick fancy or suspicion that he had brought this bouquet to

prove that he knew everything was right, and that he expected to see her. It was only a part of his universal kindness and thoughtfulness, she considered.

"Frank is upstairs," she said, "getting ready some things to go to Brighton. Will you come into the breakfast-room? Have you had breakfast?"

"Oh, you were going to Brighton."

"Yes," she said; and somehow something moved her to add, quickly, "but not for long, you know. Only a few days. It is many a time you will have told me of Brighton, long ago, in the Lewis; but I cannot understand a large town being beside the sea, and it will be a great surprise to me, I am sure of that."

"Ay, Sheila," he said, falling into the old habit quite naturally, "you will find it different from Borvabost. You will have no scampering about the rocks, with your head bear, and your hair flying about. You will have to dress more correctly there than here even; and, by the way, you must be busy getting ready, so I will go."

"Oh no," she said, with a quick look of disappointment, "you will not go yet. If I had known you were coming—but it was very late when we will get home this morning—two o'clock it was."

"Another ball?"

"Yes," said the girl, but not very joyfully.

"Why, Sheila," he said, with a grave smile on his face, "you are becoming quite a woman of fashion now. And you know I can't keep up an acquaintance with a fine lady who goes to all these grand places, and knows all sorts of swell people; so you'll have to cut me, Sheila——"

"I hope I shall be dead before that time ever comes," said the girl, with a sudden flash of indignation in her eyes. Then she softened. "But it is not kind of you to laugh at me."

"Of course, I did not laugh at you," he said, taking both her hands in his, "although I used to sometimes when you were a little girl, and talked very wild English. Don't you remember how vexed you used to be; and how pleased you were when your papa turned the laugh against me by getting me to say that awful Gaelic sentence about '*A young calf ate a raw egg*'?"

"Can you say it now?" said Sheila, with her face getting bright and pleased again. "Try it after me. Now listen."

She uttered some half-dozen of the most extraordinary sounds that any language ever contained; but Ingram would not attempt to follow her. She reproached him with having forgotten all that he had learnt in Lewis; and said

she should no longer look on him as a possible Highlander.

"But what are *you* now," he asked. "You are no longer that wild girl who used to run out to sea in the *Maighdean-mhara*, whenever there was the excitement of a storm coming on."

"Many times," she said, slowly and wistfully. "I will wish that I could be that again, for a little while."

"Don't you enjoy, then, all those fine gatherings you go to?"

"I try to like them."

"And you don't succeed."

He was looking at her gravely and earnestly; and she turned away her head, and did not answer. At this moment Lavender came down stairs, and entered the room.

"Hillo, Ingram, my boy; glad to see you! What pretty flowers—it's a pity we can't take them to Brighton with us."

"But I intend to take them," said Sheila, firmly.

"Oh, very well, if you don't mind the bother," said her husband; "I should have thought your hands would have been full—you know, you'll have to take everything with you you would want in London. You will find that Brighton isn't a dirty little fishing-village in which you've only to tuck up your dress and run about anyhow."

"I never saw a dirty little fishing-village," said Sheila, quietly.

Her husband laughed.

"I meant no offence. I was not thinking of Borvabost at all. Well, Ingram, can't you run down and see us while we are at Brighton?"

"Oh do, Mr. Ingram!" said Sheila, with quite a new interest in her face, and she came forward as though she would have gone down on her knees, and begged this great favour of him.

"Do, Mr. Ingram! We should try to amuse you some way; and the weather is sure to be fine, Shall we keep a room for you? Can you come on Friday and stay till the Monday? It is a great difference there will be in the place if you come down."

Ingram looked at Sheila, and was on the point of promising, when Lavender added—

"And we shall introduce you to that young American lady whom you are so anxious to meet."

"Oh, is she to be there?" he said, looking rather curiously at Lavender.

"Yes, she and her mother. We are going down together."

"Then I'll see whether I can, in a day or two," he said, but in a tone which pretty nearly convinced Sheila that she should not have her stay

at Brighton made pleasant by the company of her old friend and associate.

However, the mere anticipation of seeing the sea was much; and when they had got into a cab and were going down to Victoria Station Sheila's eyes were filled with a joyful anticipation. She had discarded altogether the descriptions of Brighton that had been given her. It is one thing to receive information, and another to reproduce it in an imaginative picture; and, in fact, her imagination was busy with its own work while she sat and listened to this person or the other speaking of the sea-side town she was going to. When they spoke of promenades, and drives, and miles of hotels and lodging-houses, she was thinking of the sea-beach, and of the boats, and of the sky-line with its distant ships. When they told her of private theatricals, and concerts, and fancy-dress balls, she was thinking of being out on the open sea, with a light breeze filling the sails, and a curl of white foam rising at the bow and sweeping and hissing down the sides of the boat. She would go down among the fishermen, when her husband and his friends were not by, and talk to them, and get to know what they sold there fish for down here in the South. She would find out what their nets cost; and if there was anybody in authority to whom

they could apply for an advance of a few pounds in case of hard times. Had they their cuttings of peat free from the nearest moss-land; and did they dress their fields with the thatch that had got saturated with the smoke? Perhaps some of them could tell her where the crews hailed from that had repeatedly shot the sheep of the Flannen isles. All these, and a hundred other things, she would get to know; and she might procure and send to her father some rare bird, or curiosity of the sea, that might be added to the little museum in which she used to sing, in days gone by, when he was busy with his pipe and his whisky.

"You are not much tired, then, by your dissipation of last night," said Mrs. Kavanagh to her, at the station, as the slender, fair-haired, grave lady looked admiringly at the girl's fresh colour and bright grey-blue eyes. "It makes one envy you to see you looking so strong and in such good spirits."

"How happy you must be always," said Mrs. Lorraine, and the younger lady had the same sweet, low, and kindly voice as her mother.

"I am very well, thank you," said Sheila, blushing somewhat, and not lifting her eyes; while Lavender was impatient that she had not answered with a laugh and some light retort such

as would have occurred to almost any woman in the circumstances.

On the journey down, Lavender and Mrs. Lorraine, seated opposite each other in two corner-seats, kept up a continual cross-fire of small pleasantries, in which the young American lady had distinctly the best of it, chiefly by reason of her perfect manner. The keenest thing she said was said with a look of great innocence and candour in the large grey eyes; and then directly, afterwards, she would say something very nice and pleasant, in precisely the same voice, as if she could not understand that there was any effort on the part of either to assume an advantage. The mother sometimes turned and listened to this aimless talk with an amused gravity, as of a cat watching the gambols of a kitten; but generally she devoted herself to Sheila, who sat opposite her. She did not talk much, and Sheila was glad of that; but the girl felt she was being observed with some little curiosity. She wished that Mrs. Kavanagh would turn those observant grey eyes of hers away in some other direction. Now and again, Sheila would point out what she considered strange or striking in the country outside; and for a moment the elderly lady would look out. But directly afterwards, the grey eyes would come back to Sheila; and the girl knew

they were upon her. At last, she so persistently stared out of the window, that she fell to dreaming; and all the trees, and the meadows, and the farmhouses, and the distant heights and hollows, went past her as though they were in a sort of mist; while she replied to Mrs. Kavanagh's chance remarks in a mechanical fashion, and could only hear as a monotonous murmur the talk of the two people at the other side of the carriage. How much of the journey did the girl remember? She was greatly struck by the amount of open land in the neighbourhood of London—the commons between Wandsworth and Streatham and so forth—and she was pleased with the appearance of the country about Red-hill. For the rest, a succession of fair green pictures passed by her, all bathed in a calm, half-misty, summer sunlight; then they pierced the chalk hills (which Sheila at first sight, fancied were of granite) and rumbled through the tunnels. Finally, with just a glimpse of a great mass of great houses filling a vast hollow and stretching up the bare green downs beyond—they found themselves in Brighton.

"Well, Sheila, what do you think of the place?" her husband said to her, in a kindly way, as they were driving down the Queen's Road.

She did not answer.

"It is not like Borvabost, is it?"

She was too bewildered to speak. She could only look about her with a vague wonder and disappointment. But surely this great city was not the place they had come to live in? Would it not disappear somehow, and they would get away to the sea, and the rocks, and the boats?

They passed into the upper part of the West Street, and here was another thoroughfare, down which Sheila glanced with no great interest. But the next moment, there was a quick catching of her breath, which almost resembled a sob; and a strange, glad light sprang into her eyes. Here, at last, was the sea! Away beyond the narrow thoroughfare she could catch a glimpse of a great green plain—yellow-green it was in the sunlight—that the wind was whitening here and there with tumbling waves. She had not noticed that there was any wind inland; there everything seemed asleep; but here there was a fresh breeze from the south, and the sea had been rough the day before, and now it was of this strange olive colour, streaked with the white curls of foam that shone in the sunlight. Was there not a cold scent of seaweed, too, blown up this narrow passage between the houses? And now the carriage cut round the

corner, and whirled out into the glare of the Parade; and before her the great sea stretched out its leagues of tumbling and shining waves, and she heard the water roaring along the beach, and far away at the horizon she saw a phantom ship. She did not even look at the row of splendid hotels and houses, at the gaily dressed folks on the pavement, at the brilliant flags that were flapping and fluttering on the New Pier, and about the beach. It was the great world of shining water beyond that fascinated her, and awoke in her a strange yearning and longing, so that she did not know whether it was grief or joy that burned in her heart, and blinded her eyes with tears. Mrs. Kavanagh took her arm as they were going up the steps of the hotel, and said, in a friendly way, "I suppose you have some sad memories of the sea."

"No," said Sheila, bravely, "it is always pleasant to me to think of the sea; but it is a long time since—since——"

"Sheila," said her husband, abruptly, "do tell me if all your things are here;" and then the girl turned, calm and self collected, to look after rugs and boxes.

When they were finally established in the hotel, Lavender went off to negotiate for the hire of a carriage for Mrs. Kavanagh during her

stay; and Sheila was left with the two ladies. They had tea in their sitting-room; and they had it at one of the windows, so that they could look out on the stream of people and carriages now begining to flow by in the clear yellow light of the afternoon. But neither the people nor the carriages had much interest for Sheila, who, indeed, sat for the most part silent, intently watching the various boats that were putting out or coming in, and busy with conjectures which she knew there was no use placing before her two companions.

"Brighton seems to surprise you very much," said Mrs. Lorraine.

"Yes," said Sheila, "I have been told all about it; but you will forget all that—and this is very different from the sea at home—at my home."

"Your home is in London now," said the elder lady, with a smile.

"Oh no!" said Sheila, most anxiously and earnestly. "London, that is not our home at all. We live there for a time; that will be quite necessary; but we shall go back to the Lewis some day soon—not to stay altogether, but enough to make it as much our home as London."

"How do you think Mr. Lavender will enjoy

living in the Hebrides?" said Mrs. Lorraine, with a look of innocent and friendly inquiry in her eyes.

"It was many a time that he has said he never liked any place so much," said Sheila, with something of a blush; and then she added, with growing courage, "for you must not think he is always like what he is here. Oh no; when he is in the Highlands, there is no day that is nearly long enough for what has to be done in it; and he is up very early; and away to the loch or the hills with a gun or a salmon-rod. He can catch the salmon very well—oh, very well for one that is not accustomed; and he will shoot as well as anyone that is in the island, except my papa. It is a great deal to do there will be in the island, and plenty of amusement; and there is not much chance—not any whatever—of his being lonely or tired when we go to live in the Lewis."

Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter were both amused and pleased by the earnest and rapid fashion in which Sheila talked. They had generally considered her to be a trifle shy and silent—not knowing how afraid she was of using wrong idioms or pronunciations; but here was one subject on which her heart was set, and she had no more thought as to whether she said

"like-ah-ness" or likeness, or whether she said "gyarden" or garden. Indeed, she forgot more than that. She was somewhat excited by the presence of the sea, and the well-remembered sound of the waves; and she was pleased to talk about her life in the north, and about her husband's stay there, and how they should pass the time when she returned to Borva. She neglected altogether Lavender's injunctions that she should not talk about fishing, or cooking, or farming to his friends. She incidentally revealed to Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter a great deal more about the household at Borva than he would have wished to be known. For how could they understand about his wife having her own cousin to serve at table; and what would they think of a young lady who was proud of making her father's shirts? Whatever these two ladies may have thought, they were very obviously interested; and, if they were amused, it was in a far from unfriendly fashion. Mrs. Lorraine professed herself quite charmed with Sheila's descriptions of her island life; and wished she could go up to Lewis to see all these strange things. But when she spoke of visiting the island, when Sheila and her husband were staying there, Sheila was not nearly so ready to offer her a welcome as the

daughter of a hospitable old Highlandman ought to have been.

"And will you go out in a boat now?" said Sheila, looking down to the beach.

"In a boat? What sort of a boat?" said Mrs. Kavanagh.

"Any one of those little sailing boats—it is very good boats they are, as far as I can see."

"No, thank you," said the elderly lady, with a smile. "I am not fond of small boats; and the company of the men who go with you might be a little objectionable, I should fancy."

"But you need not take any men," said Sheila; the sailing of one of those little boats, it is very simple."

"Do you mean to say you could manage the boat by yourself?"

"Oh yes. It is very simple. And my husband, he will help me."

"And what would you do, if you went out?"

"We might try the fishing. I do not see where the rocks are; but we would go off the rocks, and put down the anchor, and try the lines. You would have some ferry good fish for breakfast, in the morning."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Kavanagh, "you don't know what you propose to us. To go and roll about in an open boat, in these waves—

we should be ill in five minutes. But I suppose you don't know what sea-sickness is?"

"No," said Sheila, "but I will hear my husband speak of it often. And it is only in crossing the Channel that people will get sick."

"Why, this is the Channel!"

Sheila stared. Then she endeavoured to recall her geography. Of course, this must be a part of the Channel; but if the people in the south became ill in this weather, they must be rather feeble creatures. Her speculations on this point were cut short by the entrance of her husband, who came to announce that he had not only secured a carriage for a month, but that it would be round at the hotel-door in half-an-hour; whereupon the two American ladies said they would be ready, and left the room.

"Now go off and get dressed, Sheila," said Lavender.

She stood for a moment irresolute.

"If you wouldn't mind," she said, after a moment's hesitation, "if you would allow me to go by myself—if you would go to the driving—and let me go down to the shore——"

"Oh, nonsense!" he said. "You will have people fancying you are only a schoolgirl. How can you go down to the beach by yourself among all those loafing vagabonds, who would

pick your pocket or throw stones at you? You must behave like an ordinary Christian: now do, like a good girl, get dressed, and submit to the restraints of civilized life. It won't hurt you much."

So she left, to lay aside with some regret her rough blue dress: and he went downstairs to see about ordering dinner.

Had she come down to the sea, then, only to live the life that had nearly broken her heart in London? It seemed so. They drove up and down the Parade for about an hour and a half; and the roar of carriages drowned the rush of the waves. Then they dined in the quiet of this still summer evening; and she could only see the sea as a distant and silent picture through the windows, while the talk of her companions was either about the people whom they had seen while driving, or about matters of which she knew nothing. Then the blinds were drawn, and candles lit; and still their conversation murmured around her unheeding ears. After dinner, her husband went down to the smoking room of the hotel to have a cigar; and she was left with Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter. She went to the window, and looked through a chink in the Venetian blinds. There was a beautiful clear twilight abroad, the darkness was

still of a soft grey, and up in the pale yellow-green of the sky a large planet burned and throbbed. Soon the sea and the sky would darken; the stars would come forth in thousands and tens of thousands; and the moving water would be struck with a million trembling spots of silver, as the waves came onward to the beach.

"Mayn't we go out for a walk till Frank has finished his cigar?" said Sheila.

"You couldn't go out walking at this time of night," said Mrs. Kavanagh, in a kindly way; "you would meet the most unpleasant persons. Besides, going out into the night air would be most dangerous."

"It is a beautiful night," said Sheila, with a sigh. She was still standing at the window.

"Come," said Mrs. Kavanagh, going over to her and putting her hand in her arm. "We cannot have any moping, you know. You must be content to be dull with us for one night; and after to-night, we shall see what we can do to amuse you."

"Oh, but I don't want to be amused!" cried Sheila, almost in terror, for some vision flashed on her mind of a series of parties. "I would much rather be left alone, and allowed to go about by myself. But it is very kind of you," she hastily added, fancying that her speech had

been somewhat ungracious; "it is very kind of you indeed."

"Come, I promised to teach you cribbage, didn't I?"

"Yes," said Sheila, with much resignation; and she walked to the table, and sat down.

Perhaps, after all, she could have spent the rest of the evening with some little equanimity, in patiently trying to learn this game, in which she had no interest whatever; but her thoughts and fancies were soon drawn away from cribbage. Her husband returned. Mrs. Lorraine had been for some little time at the big piano at the other side of the room, amusing herself by playing snatches of anything she happened to remember; but when Mr. Lavender returned, she seemed to wake up. He went over to her and sat down by the piano.

"Here," she said, "I have all the duets and songs you spoke of; and I am quite delighted with those I have tried. I wish Mamma would sing a second to me—how can one learn without practising? And there are some of those duets I really should like to learn after what you said of them."

"Shall I become a substitute for your mamma?" he said.

"And sing the second, so that I may prac-

tise? Your cigar must have left you in a very amiable mood."

"Well, suppose we try," he said, and he proceeded to open out the roll of music which she had brought down.

"Which shall we take first?" he asked.

"It does not much matter," she answered indifferently, and, indeed, she took up one of the duets by haphazard. What was it made Mrs. Kavanagh's companion suddenly lift her eyes from the cribbage-board, and look with surprise to the other end of the room? She had recognized the little prelude to one of her own duets, and it was being played by Mrs. Lorraine. And it was Mrs. Lorraine who began to sing—in a sweet, expressive, and well-trained voice of no great power—

"Love in thine eyes for ever plays,"

and it was she to whom the answer was given—

"He in thy snowy bosom strays;"

and then, Sheila, sitting stupefied, and pained and confused, heard them sing together—

"He makes thy rosy lips his care,
And walks the mazes of thy hair."

She had not heard the short conversation which had introduced this music; and she could not

tell but that her husband had been practising these duets—her duets—with some one else. For presently they sang, "When the rosy morn appearing," and "I would that my love could silently," and others, all of them, in Sheila's eyes, sacred to the time when she and Frank Lavender used to sit in the little room at Borva. It was no consolation to her that Mrs. Lorraine had but an imperfect acquaintance with them; that oftentimes she stumbled and went back over a bit of the accompaniment; that her voice was far from being striking. Lavender, at all events, seemed to heed none of these things. It was not as a music-master that he sang with her. He put as much expression of love into his voice as ever he had done in the old days when he sang with his future bride. And it seemed so cruel that this woman should have taken Sheila's own duets from her, to sing before her, with her own husband. Sheila learnt little more cribbage that evening. Mrs. Kavanagh could not understand how her pupil had become embarrassed, inattentive, and even sad; and asked her if she was tired. Sheila said she was very tired, and would go. And, when she got her candle, Mrs. Lorraine and Lavender had just discovered another duet which they felt bound to try together, as the last.

This was not the first time she had been more or less vaguely pained by her husband's attentions to this young American lady; and yet she would not admit to herself that he was any way in the wrong. She would entertain no suspicion of him. She would have no jealousy in her heart; for how could jealousy exist with a perfect faith? And so she had repeatedly reasoned herself out of these tentative feelings, and resolved that she would do neither her husband nor Mrs. Lorraine the injustice of being vexed with them. So it was now. What more natural than that Frank should recommend to any friend the duets of which he was particularly fond? What more natural than that this young lady should wish to show her appreciation of those songs by singing them; and who was to sing with her but he? Sheila would have no suspicion of either; and so she came down next morning determined to be very friendly with Mrs. Lorraine.

But that forenoon another thing occurred which nearly broke down all her resolves.

"Sheila," said her husband, "I don't think I ever asked you whether you rode."

"I used to ride many times at home," she said.

"But I suppose you'd rather not ride here,"

he said. "Mrs. Lorraine and I propose to go out presently: you'll be able to amuse yourself somehow till we come back."

Mrs. Lorraine had, indeed, gone to put on her habit; and her mother was with her.

"I suppose I may go out," said Sheila. "It is so very dull indoors, and Mrs. Kavanagh is afraid of the east wind, and she is not going out."

"Well, there's no harm in your going out; but I should have thought you'd have liked the comfort of watching the people pass from the window."

Sheila said nothing; but went off to her own room, and dressed to go out. Why, she knew not, but she felt she would rather not see her husband and Mrs. Lorraine start from the hotel-door. She stole downstairs, without going into the sitting-room; and then, going through the great hall and down the steps, found herself free and alone in Brighton.

It was a beautiful, bright, clear day, though the wind was a trifle chilly; and all around her there was a sense of space, and light, and motion in the shining skies, the far clouds, and the heaving and noisy sea. Yet she had none of the gladness of heart with which she used to rush out of the house at Borva, to drink in the fresh

salt air, and feel the sunlight on her cheeks. She walked away, with her face wistful and pensive, along the King's Road, scarcely seeing any of the people who passed her; and the noise of the crowd and of the waves hummed in her ears in a distant fashion, even as she walked along the wooden railing over the beach. She stopped and watched some men putting off a heavy fishing-boat; and she still stood and looked long after the boat was launched. She would not confess to herself that she felt lonely and miserable: it was the sight of the sea that was melancholy. It seemed so different from the sea off Borva, that had always to her a familiar and friendly look, even when it was raging and rushing before a south-west wind. Here this sea looked vast, and calm, and sad; and the sound of it was not pleasant to her ears as was the sound of the waves on the rocks at Borva. She walked on, in a blind and unthinking fashion, until she had got far up the Parade, and could see the long line of monotonous white cliff meeting the dull blue plain of the waves until both disappeared in the horizon.

She returned to the King's Road, a trifle tired, and sat down on one of the benches there. The passing of the people would amuse her; and now the pavement was thronged with a

crowd of gaily-dressed folks, and the centre of the thoroughfare was brisk with the constant going and coming of riders. She saw strange old women, painted, powdered, and bewigged, in hideous imitation of youth, pounding up and down the level street, and she wondered what wild hallucinations possessed the brains of these poor creatures. She saw troops of beautiful young girls, with flowing hair, clear eyes, and bright complexions, riding by—a goodly company—under charge of a riding mistress; and the world seemed to grow sweeter when they came into view. But while she was vaguely gazing, and wondering, and speculating, her eyes were suddenly caught by two riders whose appearance sent a throb to her heart. Frank Lavender rode well; so did Mrs. Lorraine; and, though they were paying no particular attention to the crowd of passers-by, they doubtless knew that they could challenge criticism with an easy confidence. They were laughing and talking to each other as they went rapidly by; neither of them saw Sheila. The girl did not look after them. She rose and walked in the other direction, with a greater pain at her heart than had been there for many a day.

What was this crowd? Some dozen or so of people were standing round a small girl who,

accompanied by a man, was playing a violin, and playing it very well, too. But it was not the music that attracted Sheila to the child; but partly that there was a look about the timid, pretty face, and the modest and honest eyes, that reminded her of little Ailasa, and partly because, just at this moment, her heart seemed to be strangely sensitive and sympathetic. She took no thought of the people looking on. She went forward to the edge of the pavement, and found that the small girl and her companions were about to go away. Sheila stopped the man.

"Will you let your little girl come with me into this shop?"

It was a confectioner's shop.

"We were going home to dinner," said the man, while the small girl looked up with wondering eyes.

"Will you let her have dinner with me, and you will come back in half-an-hour?"

The man looked at the little girl; he seemed to be really fond of her, and saw that she was very willing to go. Sheila took her hand, and led her into the confectioner's shop, putting her violin on one of the small marble tables while they sat down at another. She was probably not aware that two or three idlers had followed

them, and were staring with might and main in at the door of the shop.

What could this child have thought of the beautiful and yet sad-eyed lady who was so kind to her, who got her all sorts of things with her own hands, and asked her all manner of questions in a low, gentle, and sweet voice? There was not much in Sheila's appearance to provoke fear or awe. The little girl, shy at first, got to be a little more frank; and told her hostess when she rose in the morning, how she practised, the number of hours they were out during the day, and many of the small incidents of her daily life. She had been photographed too, and her photograph was sold in one of the shops. She was very well content; she liked playing; the people were kind to her, and she did not often get tired.

"Then I shall see you often if I stay in Brighton?" said Sheila.

"We go out every day when it does not rain very hard."

"Perhaps some wet day you will come and see me, and you will have some tea with me; would you like that?"

"Yes, very much," said the small musician, looking up frankly.

Just at this moment—the half-hour having fully expired—the man appeared at the door.

"Don't hurry," said Sheila to the little girl; "sit still and drink up the lemonade; then I will give you some little parcels you must put in your pocket."

She was about to rise to go to the counter, when she suddenly met the eyes of her husband, who was calmly staring at her. He had come out, after their ride, with Mrs. Lorraine to have a stroll up and down the pavements; and had, in looking in at the various shops, caught sight of Sheila quietly having luncheon with this girl whom she had picked up in the streets.

"Did you ever see the like of that?" he said to Mrs. Lorraine. "In open day—with people staring in—and she has not even taken the trouble to put the violin out of sight."

"The poor child means no harm," said his companion.

"Well, we must get her out of this somehow," he said, and so they entered the shop.

Sheila knew she was guilty the moment she met her husband's look, though she had never dreamed of it before. She had, indeed, acted quite thoughtlessly—perhaps chiefly moved by a desire to speak to some one, and to befriend some one in her own loneliness.

"Hadn't you better let this little girl go?" said Lavender to Sheila, with an embarrassed laugh, as soon as he had ordered an ice for his companion.

"When she has finished her lemonade she will go," said Sheila, meekly. "But I have to buy some things for her first."

"You have got a whole lot of people round the door," he said.

"It was very kind of the people to wait for her," answered Sheila, with the same composure. "We have been here half-an-hour. I suppose they will like her music very much."

The little violinist was now taken to the counter, and her pockets stuffed with packages of sugared fruits and other dainty delicacies; then she was permitted to go with half-a-crown in her hand. Mrs. Lorraine patted her shoulder in passing, and said she was a pretty little thing.

They went home to luncheon. Nothing was said about the incident of the forenoon, except that Lavender complained to Mrs. Kavanagh, in a humorous way, that his wife had a most extraordinary fondness for beggars; and that he never went home of an evening without expecting to find her dining with the nearest scavenger and his family. Lavender, indeed, was in an amiable frame of mind at this meal (during the progress

of which Sheila sat by the window, of course, for she had already lunched in company with the tiny violinist), and was bent on making himself as agreeable as possible to his two companions. Their talk had drifted towards the wanderings of the ladies on the Continent; from that to the Nibelungen frescoes in Munich; from that to the Nibelungen itself, and then, by easy transition, to the ballads of Uhland and Heine. Lavender was in one of his most impulsive and brilliant moods—gay and jocular, tender and sympathetic by turns, and so obviously sincere in all that his listeners were delighted with his speeches, and assertions, and stories, and believed them as implicitly as he did himself. Sheila, sitting at a distance, saw and heard, and could not help recalling many an evening in the far north, when Lavender used to fascinate everyone around him by the infection of his warm and poetic enthusiasm. How he talked, too—telling the stories of these quaint and pathetic ballads in his own rough-and-ready translations—while there was no self-consciousness in his face, but a thorough warmth of earnestness; and sometimes, too, she would notice a quiver of the under lip that she knew of old, when some pathetic point or phrase had to be indicated rather than described. He was drawing pictures for them as

well as telling stories—of the three students entering the room in which the landlady's daughter lay dead—of Barbarossa in his cave—of the child who used to look up at Heine as he passed her in the street, awe-stricken by his pale and strange face—of the last of the band of companions who sat in the solitary room in which they had sat, and drank to their memory—of the King of Thule, and the deserter from Strasburg, and a thousand others.

"But is there any of them—is there anything in the world more pitiable than that pilgrimage to Kevlaar?" he said. "You know it, of course. No! Oh, you must, surely. Don't you remember the mother who stood by the bedside of her sick son, and asked him whether he would not rise to see the great procession go by the window; and he tells her that he cannot—he is so ill—his heart is breaking for thinking of his dead Gretchen? *You* know the story, Sheila. The mother begs him to rise and come with her, and they will join the band of pilgrims going to Kevlaar, to be healed there of their wounds by the Mother of God. Then you find them at Kevlaar, and all the maimed and the lame people have come to the shrine; and whichever limb is diseased, they make a waxen image of that, and lay it on the altar, and then they are healed.

Well, the mother of this poor lad takes wax and forms a heart out of it, and says to her son, 'Take that to the Mother of God, and she will heal your pain.' Sighing, he takes the wax heart in his hand, and, sighing, he goes to the shrine; and there, with tears running down his face, he says, 'O beautiful Queen of Heaven, I am come to tell you my grief. I lived with my mother in Cologne—near us lived Gretchen—who is dead now. Blessed Mary, I bring you this wax heart; heal the wound in my heart.' And then—and then——"

Sheila saw his lip tremble. But he frowned, and said, impatiently—

"What a shame it is to destroy such a beautiful story! You can have no idea of it—of its simplicity and tenderness——"

"But pray let us hear the rest of it," said Mrs. Lorraine, gently.

"Well, the last scene, you know, is a small chamber, and the mother and her sick son are asleep. The Blessed Mary glides into the chamber, and bends over the young man, and puts her hand lightly on his heart. Then she smiles and disappears. The mother has seen all this in a dream, and now she awakes, for the dogs are barking loudly. The mother goes over to the bed of her son, and he is dead, and the morning

light touches his pale face. And then the mother meekly folds her hands,—and says——"

He rose hastily, with a gesture of fretfulness, and walked over to the window at which Sheila sat, and looked out. She put her hand up to his; he took it.

"The next time I try to translate Heine," he said, making it appear that he had broken off through vexation, "something strange will happen."

"It is a beautiful story," said Mrs. Lorraine, who had herself been crying a little bit, in a covert way; "I wonder I have not seen a translation of it. Come, Mamma, Lady Leveret said we were not to be after four."

So they rose and left; and Sheila was alone with her husband, and still holding his hand. She looked up at him timidly, wondering, perhaps, in her simple way, as to whether she should not now pour out her heart to him, and tell him all her griefs, and fears, and yearnings. He had obviously been deeply moved by the story he had told so roughly; surely now was a good opportunity of appealing to him, and begging for sympathy and compassion.

"Frank," she said, and she rose, and came close, and bent down her head to hide the colour in her face.

"Well?" he answered.

"You won't be vexed with me," she said, in a low voice, and with her heart beginning to beat rapidly.

"Vexed with you about what, Sheila?" he said.

Alas! all her hopes had fled. She shrank from the wondering look with which she knew he was regarding her. She felt it to be impossible that she should place before him those confidences with which she had approached him; and so, with a great effort, she merely said—

"Are we to go to Lady Leveret's?"

"I suppose so," he said, "unless you would rather go and see some blind fiddler or beggar. Sheila, you should really not be so forgetful; what if Lady Leveret, for example, had come into that shop? You should remember you are a woman, and not a child. Do you ever see Mrs. Kavanagh or her daughter do any of these things?"

Sheila had let go his hand; her eyes were still turned towards the ground. She had fancied that a little of that emotion that had been awakened in him by the story of the German mother and her son might warm his heart towards herself, and render it possible for her to talk to him frankly about all that she had

been dimly thinking, and more definitely suffering. She was mistaken: that was all.

"I will try to do better, and please you," she said; and then she went away.

CHAPTER VI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Was it a delusion that had grown up in the girl's mind, and now held full possession of it—that she was in a world with which she had no sympathy, that she should never be able to find a home there, that the influences of it were gradually and surely stealing from her her husband's love and confidence? Or was this longing to get away from the people and the circumstances that surrounded her, but the unconscious promptings of an incipient jealousy? She did not question her own mind closely on these points. She only vaguely knew that she was miserable, and that she could not tell her husband of the weight that pressed on her heart.

Here, too, as they drove along to have tea with a certain Lady Leveret, who was one of Lavender's especial patrons, and to whom he had introduced Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter, Sheila felt that she was a stranger, an interloper,

a "third wheel to the cart." She scarcely spoke a word. She looked at the sea; but she had almost grown to regard that great plain of smooth water as a melancholy and monotonous thing—not the bright and boisterous sea of her youth, with its winding channels, its secret bays and rocks, its salt winds, and rushing waves. She was disappointed with the perpetual wall of white cliff, where she had expected to see something of the black and rugged shore of the north. She had as yet made no acquaintance with the sea-life of the place; she did not know where the curers lived, whether they gave the fishermen credit and cheated them, whether the people about here made any use of the back of the dog-fish, or could, in hard seasons, cook any of the wild fowl; what the ling, and the cod, and the skate fetched; where the wives and daughters sat and span and carded their wool; whether they knew how to make a good dish of cockles boiled in milk. She smiled to herself when she thought of asking Mrs. Lorraine about any such things; but she still cherished some vague hope that, before she left Brighton, she would have some little chance of getting near to the sea and learning a little of the sea-life down in the south.

And as they drove along the King's Road on this afternoon, she suddenly called out—

"Look, Frank!"

On the steps of the Old Ship hotel stood a small man with a brown face, a brown beard, and a beaver hat, who was calmly smoking a wooden pipe, and looking at an old woman selling oranges in front of him.

"It is Mr. Ingram!" said Sheila.

"Which is Mr. Ingram!" asked Mrs. Lorraine, with considerable interest, for she had often heard Lavender speak of his friend. "Not that little man?"

"Yes," said Lavender, coldly: he could have wished that Ingram had had some little more regard for appearances in so public a place as the main thoroughfare of Brighton.

"Won't you stop and speak to him?" said Sheila, with great surprise.

"We are late already," said her husband. "But if you would rather go back and speak to him than go on with us, you may."

Sheila said nothing more; and so they drove on to the end of the Parade, where Lady Leveret held possession of a big white house with pillars, overlooking the broad street and the sea.

But next morning she said to him—

"I suppose you will be riding with Mrs. Lorraine this morning?"

"I suppose so."

"I should like to go and see Mr. Ingram, if he is still there," she said.

"Ladies don't generally call at hotels and ask to see gentlemen," he said, with a laugh and a shrug; "but of course you don't care for that."

The permission, if it was intended to be a permission, was not very gracious, but Sheila accepted it, and very shortly after breakfast she changed her dress and went out. How pleasant it was to feel that she was going to see her old friend, to whom she could talk freely! The morning seemed to know of her gladness, and to share in it; for there was a brisk southerly breeze blowing fresh in from the sea, and the waves were leaping white in the sunlight. There was no more sluggishness in the air, or the grey sky, or the leaden plain of the sea. Sheila knew that the blood was mantling in her cheeks; that her heart was full of joy; that her whole frame so tingled with life and spirit that, had she been in Borva, she would have challenged her deer-hound to a race, and fled down the side of the hill with him to the small bay of white sand below the house. She did not pause for a minute when she reached the hotel. She went up the steps, opened the door, and entered the square hall. There was an odour of tobacco in the place; and several gentlemen standing

about rather confused her, for she had to glance at them in looking for a waiter. Another minute would probably have found her a trifle embarrassed: but just at this crisis she saw Ingram himself come out of a room, with a cigarette in his hand. He threw away the cigarette, and came forward to her with amazement in his eyes.

"Where is Mr. Lavender? Has he gone into the smoking-room for me?" he asked.

"He is not here," said Sheila. "I have come for you by myself."

For a moment, too, Ingram felt the eyes of the men on him; but directly he said, with a fine air of carelessness, "Well, that is very good of you. Shall we go out for a stroll until your husband comes?"

So he opened the door and followed her outside, into the fresh air and the roar of the waves.

"Well, Sheila," he said, "this is very good of you, really: where is Mr. Lavender?"

"He generally rides with Mrs. Lorraine in the morning."

"And what do you do?"

"I sit at the window."

"Don't you go boating?"

"No, I have not been in a boat. They do not care for it. And yesterday, it was a letter

to Papa I was writing, and I could tell him nothing about the people here or the fishing."

"But you could not in any case, Sheila. I suppose you would like to know what they pay for their lines, and how they dye their wool, and so on; but you would find the fishermen here don't live in that way at all. They are all civilized, you know, they buy their cloth in the shops. They never eat any sort of seaweed, or dye with it either. However, I will tell you all about it by and by. At present, I suppose you are returning to your hotel."

A quick look of pain and disappointment passed over her face, as she turned to him for a moment, with something of entreaty in her eyes.

"I came to see you," she said. "But perhaps you have an engagement—I do not wish to take up any of your time—if you please, I will go back alone to——"

"Now, Sheila," he said, with a smile, and with the old friendly look she knew so well, "you must not talk like that to me. I won't have it. You know I came down to Brighton because you asked me to come; and my time is altogether at your service."

"And you have no engagement just now?" said Sheila, with her face brightening.

"No."

"And you will take me down to the shore, to see the boats, and the nets? Or could we go out and run along the coast for a few miles? It is a very good wind."

"Oh, I should be very glad," said Ingram, slowly. "I should be delighted. But, you see, wouldn't your husband think it—wouldn't he, you know—wouldn't it seem just a little odd to him if you were to go away like that?"

"He is to go riding with Mrs. Lorraine," said Sheila, quite simply. "He does not want me."

"Of course you told him you were coming to see—you were going to call at the Old Ship?"

"Yes. And I am sure he would not be surprised if I did not return for a long time."

"Are you quite sure, Sheila?"

"Yes, I am quite sure."

"Very well. Now I shall tell you what I am going to do with you. I shall first go and bribe some mercenary boatman to let us have one of those small sailing boats committed to our own exclusive charge. I shall constitute you skipper and pilot of the craft, and hold you responsible for my safety. I shall smoke a pipe to prepare me for whatever may befall——"

"Oh, no," said Sheila. "You must work very hard; and I will see if you remember all that I taught you in the Lewis. And if we can

have some long lines, we might get some fish. Will they pay more than thirty shillings for their long lines in this country?"

"I don't know," said Ingram. "I believe most of the fishermen here live upon the shillings they get from passers-by, after a little conversation about the weather, and their hard lot in life; so that one doesn't talk to them more than one can help."

"But why do they need the money? Is there no fish?"

"I don't know that, either. I suppose there is some good fishing in the winter, and sometimes in the summer they get some big shoals of mackerel."

"It was a letter I had last week from the sister of one of the men of the *Nighean-dubh,* and she told me that they have been very lucky all through the last season, and it was near six thousand ling they got."

"But I suppose they are hopelessly in debt to some curer or other up about Habost?"

"Oh no, not all. It is their own boat—it is not hired to them. And it is a very good boat whatever."

That unlucky "whatever" had slipped out inadvertently; the moment she had uttered it, she blushed, and looked timidly towards her

companion, fearing that he had noticed it. He had not. How could she have made such a blunder? she asked herself. She had been most particular about the avoidance of this word, even in the Lewis. The girl did not know that, from the moment she had left the steps of the Old Ship, in company with this good friend of hers, she had unconsciously fallen into much of her old pronunciation and her old habit of speech; while Ingram, much more familiar with the Sheila of Borvabost and Loch Roag than the Sheila of Notting Hill and Kensington Gardens, did not perceive the difference, but was mightily pleased to hear her talk in any fashion whatsoever.

By fair means or foul, Ingram managed to secure a pretty little sailing vessel which lay at anchor out near the New Pier; and when the pecuniary negotiations were over, Sheila was invited to walk down over the loose stones of the beach, and take command of the craft. The boatman was still very doubtful. When he had pulled them out to the boat, however, and put them on board, he speedily perceived that this handsome young lady not only knew everything that had to be done in the way of getting the small vessel ready, but had a very smart and business-like way of doing it. It was very

obvious that her companion did not know half as much about the matter as she did; but he was obedient and watchful, and presently they were ready to start. The man put off in his boat to shore again much relieved in mind but not a little puzzled to understand where the young lady had picked up, not merely her knowledge of boats, but the ready way in which she put her delicate hands to hard work, and the prompt and effectual fashion in which she accomplished it.

"Shall I belay away the jib, or reef the upper hatchways?" Ingram called out to Sheila, when they had fairly got under way.

She did not answer for a moment; she was still watching, with a critical eye, the manner in which the boat answered to her wishes; and then, when everything promised well, and she was quite satisfied, she said—

"If you will take my place for a moment, and keep a good look-out, I will put on my gloves."

She surrendered the tiller and the main-sail sheet into his care, and, with another glance ahead, pulled out her gloves.

"You did not use to fear the salt water or the sun on your hands, Sheila," said her companion.

"I do not now," she said, "but Frank would

be displeased to see my hands brown. He has himself such pretty hands."

What Ingram thought about Frank Lavender's delicate hands he was not going to say to his wife; and, indeed, he was called upon at this moment to let Sheila resume her post, which she did with an air of great satisfaction and content.

And so they ran lightly through the curling and dashing water on this brilliant day, caring little indeed for the great town that lay away to leeward, with its shining terraces surmounted by a faint cloud of smoke. Here all the roar of carriages and people was unheard: the only sound that accompanied their talk was the splashing of the waves at the prow and the hissing and gurgling of the water along the boat. The south wind blew fresh and sweet around them, filling the broad, white sails, and fluttering the small pennon up there in the blue. It seemed strange to Sheila that she should be so much alone with so great a town close by; that under the boom she could catch a glimpse of the noisy Parade without hearing any of its noise. But there, away to windward, there was no more trace of city life—only the great blue sea, with its waves flowing on towards them from out of the far horizon, and with here and there a

pale ship just appearing on the line where the sky and ocean met.

"Well, Sheila, how do you like to be on the sea again?" said Ingram, getting out his pipe.

"Oh, very well. But you must not smoke, Mr. Ingram; you must attend to the boat."

"Don't you feel at home in her yet?" he asked.

"I am not afraid of her," said Sheila, regarding the lines of the small craft with the eye of a shipbuilder, "but she is very narrow in the beam, and she carries too much sail for so small a thing. I suppose they have not any squalls on this coast, where you have no hills, and no Narrows to go through."

"It doesn't remind you of Lewis, does it?" he said, filling his pipe all the same.

"A little—out there it does," she said, turning to the broad plain of the sea; "but it is not much that is in this country that is like the Lewis—sometimes I think I shall be a stranger when I go back to the Lewis, and the people will scarcely know me, and everything will be changed."

He looked at her for a second or two. Then he laid down his pipe, which had not been lit, and said to her, gravely—

"I want you to tell me, Sheila, why you have got into a habit lately of talking about many

things, and especially about your home in the north, in that sad way. You did not do that when you came to London first; and yet it was then that you might have been struck and shocked by the difference. You had no home-sickness for a long time—but is it home-sickness, Sheila?"

How was she to tell him? For an instant she was on the point of giving him all her confidence; and then, somehow or other, it occurred to her that she would be wronging her husband in seeking such sympathy from a friend as she had been expecting—and expecting in vain—from him.

"Perhaps it is home-sickness," she said, in a low voice, while she pretended to be busy tightening up the mainsail sheet. "I should like to see Borva again."

"But you don't want to live there all your life?" he said. "You know that would be unreasonable, Sheila, even if your husband could manage it, and I don't suppose he can. Surely your papa does not expect you to go and live in Lewis always?"

"Oh no," she said, eagerly. "You must not think my papa wishes anything like that. It will be much less than that he was thinking of when he used to speak to Mr. Lavender about it.

And I do not wish to live in the Lewis always—I have no dislike to London—none at all—only that—that——"

And here she paused.

"Come, Sheila," he said, in the old paternal way to which she had been accustomed to yield up all her own wishes in the old days of their friendship, "I want you to be frank with me, and tell me what is the matter. I know there is something wrong; I have seen it for some time back. Now you know I took the responsibility of your marriage on my shoulders; and I am responsible to you, and to your papa and to myself, for your comfort and happiness. Do you understand?"

She still hesitated—grateful in her inmost heart; but still doubtful as to what she should do.

"You look on me as an intermeddler," he said, with a smile.

"No, no!" she said, "you have always been our best friend."

"But I have intermeddled none the less—don't you remember when I told you I was prepared to accept the consequences?"

It seemed so long a time since then?

"And once having begun to intermeddle, I can't stop, don't you see? Now, Sheila, you'll be a good little girl, and do what I tell you.

You'll take the boat a long way out, we'll put her head round, take down the sails, and let her tumble about and drift for a time, till you tell me all about your troubles, and then we'll see what can be done."

She obeyed in silence; with her face grown grave enough in anticipation of the coming disclosures. She knew that the first plunge into them would be keenly painful to her; but there was a feeling at her heart that, this penance over, a great relief would be at hand. She trusted this man as she would have trusted her own father. She knew that there was nothing on earth he would not attempt, if he fancied it would help her. And she knew, too, that having experienced so much of his great unselfishness and kindness and thoughtfulness, she was ready to obey him implicitly, in anything that he could assure her was right for her to do.

How far away seemed the white cliffs now, and the faint green downs above them! Brighton, lying farther to the west, had become dim and yellow, and over it a cloud of smoke lay thick and brown in the sunlight. A mere streak showed the line of the King's Road and all its carriages and people; the beach beneath could just be made out by the white dots

of the bathing-machines. The brown fishing-boats seemed to be close in shore; the two piers were foreshortened into small dusky masses marking the beginning of the sea. And then, from these distant and faintly-defined objects, out here to the side of the small white-and-pink boat, that lay lightly in the lapping water, stretched that great and moving network of waves, with here and there a sharp gleam of white foam curling over amid the dark blue-green.

Ingram took his seat by Sheila's side, so that he should not have to look in her downcast face; and then, with some little preliminary nervousness and hesitation, the girl told her story. She told it to sympathetic ears: and yet Ingram—having partly guessed how matters stood, and anxious, perhaps, to know whether much of her trouble might not be merely the result of fancies which could be reasoned and explained away—was careful to avoid anything like corroboration. He let her talk in her own simple and artless way; and the girl spoke to him, after a little while, with an earnestness which showed how deeply she felt her position. At the very outset she told him that her love for her husband had never altered for a moment—that all the prayer and desire of her heart was

that they two might be to each other as she had at one time hoped they would be, when he got to know her better. She went over all the story of her coming to London, of her first experiences there, of the conviction that grew upon her that her husband was somehow disappointed with her and only anxious now that she should conform to the ways and habits of the people with whom he associated. She spoke of her efforts to obey his wishes, and how heart-sick she was with her failures, and of the dissatisfaction which he showed. She spoke of the people to whom he devoted his life; of the way in which he passed his time; and of the impossibility of her showing him, so long as he thus remained apart from her, the love she had in her heart for him, and the longing for sympathy which that love involved. And then she came to the question of Mrs. Lorraine; and here it seemed to Ingram she was trying at once to put her husband's conduct in the most favourable light, and to blame herself for her unreasonableness. Mrs. Lorraine was a pleasant companion to him: she could talk cleverly and brightly; she was pretty, and she knew a large number of his friends. Sheila was anxious to show that it was the most natural thing in the world that her husband,

finding her so out of communion with his ordinary surroundings, should make an especial friend of this graceful and fascinating woman. And if, at times, it hurt her to be left alone—but here the girl broke down somewhat, and Ingram pretended not to know that she was crying.

These were strange things to be told to a man; and they were difficult to answer. But out of these revelations—which rather took the form of a cry than of any distinct statement—he formed a notion of Sheila's position sufficiently exact; and the more he looked at it, the more alarmed and pained he grew, for he knew more of her than her husband did. He knew the latent force of character that underlay all her submissive gentleness. He knew the keen sense of pride her Highland birth had given her; and he feared what might happen if this sensitive and proud heart of hers were driven into rebellion by some—possibly unintentional—wrong. And this high-spirited, fearless, honour-loving girl—who was gentle and obedient, not through any timidity or limpness of character, but because she considered it her duty to be gentle and obedient—was to be cast aside, and have her tenderest feelings outraged and wounded, for the sake of an unscrupulous, shallow-brained

woman of fashion who was not fit to be Sheila's waiting-maid. Ingram had never seen Mrs. Lorraine; but he had formed his own opinion of her. The opinion, based upon nothing, was wholly wrong; but it served to increase, if that were possible, his sympathy with Sheila, and his resolve to interfere on her behalf at whatever cost.

"Sheila," he said, gravely putting his hand on her shoulder, as if she were still the little girl who used to run wild with him about the Borva rocks, "you are a good woman."

He added to himself that Lavender knew little of the value of the wife he had got; but he dared not say that to Sheila, who would suffer no imputation against her husband to be uttered in her presence, however true it might be, or however much she had cause to know it to be true.

"And after all," he said, in a lighter voice, "I think I can do something to mend all this. I will say for Frank Lavender that he is a thoroughly good fellow at heart; and that when you appeal to him, and put things fairly before him, and show him what he ought to do, there is not a more honourable and straightforward man in the world. I believe, if I wanted money this moment, and it could only

be got that way, he would live for a month on bread and water to give it me. He is not selfish, Sheila, but he is thoughtless. He has been led away by these people, you know, and has not been aware of what you were suffering. When I put the matter before him, you will see it will be all right; and I hope to persuade him to give up this constant idling, and take to his work, and have something to live for. I wish you and I together could get him to go away from London altogether—get him to take to serious landscape painting on some wild coast—the Galway coast, for example——"

"Why not the Lewis?" said Sheila, her heart turning to the north as naturally as the needle.

"Or the Lewis. And I should like you and him to live away from hotels, and luxuries, and all such things; and he would work all day, and you would do the cooking, in some small cottage you could rent, you know——"

"You make me so happy in thinking of that," she said, with her eyes growing wet again.

"And why should he not do so? There is nothing romantic or idyllic about it; but a good, wholesome, plain sort of life, that is likely to make an honest painter of him, and

bring both of you some well-earned money. And you might have a boat like this——"

"We are drifting too far in," said Sheila, suddenly rising. "Shall we go back now?"

"By all means," he said; and so the small boat was put under canvas again, and was soon making way through the breezy water.

"Well, all this seems simple enough, doesn't it?" said Ingram.

"Yes," said the girl, with her face full of hope.

"And then, of course, when you are quite comfortable together, and making heaps of money, you can turn round and abuse me, and say I made all the mischief to begin with."

"Did we do so before, when you were very kind to us?" she said, in a low voice.

"Oh, but that was different. To interfere on behalf of two young folks who are in love with each other is dangerous; but to interfere between two people who are married—that is a certain quarrel. I wonder what you will say when you are scolding me, Sheila, and bidding me get out of the house. I have never heard you scold. Is it Gaelic or English you prefer?"

"I prefer whichever can say the nicest things to my very good friends, and tell them how grateful I am for their kindness to me."

"Ah, well, we'll see."

When they got back to shore it was half-past one.

"You will come and have some luncheon with us," said Sheila, when they had gone up the steps and into the King's Road.

"Will that lady be there?"

"Mrs. Lorraine? Yes."

"Then I'll come some other time."

"But why not now?" said Sheila. "It is not necessary that you will see us only to speak about those things we have been talking over?"

"Oh no, not at all. If you and Mr. Lavender were by yourselves I should come at once."

"And you are afraid of Mrs. Lorraine?" said Sheila, with a smile. "She is a very nice lady indeed—you have no cause to dislike her."

"But I don't want to meet her, Sheila, that is all," he said; and she knew well, by the precision of his manner, that there was no use trying to persuade him further.

He walked along to the hotel with her, meeting a considerable stream of fashionably-dressed folks on the way; and neither he nor she seemed to remember that his costume—a blue pilot-jacket, not a little worn and soiled with the salt water, and a beaver hat that had seen

a good deal of rough weather in the Highlands —was much more comfortable than elegant. He said to her, as he left her at the hotel—

"Would you mind telling Lavender I shall drop in at half-past three, and that I expect to see him in the coffee-room? I shan't keep him five minutes."

She looked at him for a moment; and he saw that she knew what his appointment meant, for her eyes were full of gladness and gratitude. He went away pleased at heart that she put so much trust in him. And in this case, he should be able to reward that confidence; for Lavender was really a good sort of fellow, and would at once be sorry for the wrong he had unintentionally done, and be only too anxious to set it right. He ought to leave Brighton at once, and London too. He ought to go away into the country, or by the seaside, and begin working hard, to earn money and self-respect at the same time; and then, in this friendly solitude, he would get to know something about Sheila's character, and begin to perceive how much more valuable were these genuine qualities of heart and mind than any social graces such as might lighten up a dull drawing-room. Had Lavender yet learnt to know the worth of an honest woman's perfect love and unquestioning devo-

tion? Let these things be put before him, and he would go and do the right thing, as he had many a time done before, in obedience to the lecturing of his friend.

Ingram called at half-past three, and went into the coffee-room. There was no one in the long, large room; and he sat down at one of the small tables by the windows, from which a bit of lawn, the King's Road, and the sea beyond were visible. He had scarcely taken his seat when Lavender came in.

"Hallo, Ingram, how are you?" he said, in his freest and friendliest way. "Won't you come upstairs? Have you had lunch? Why did you go to the Ship?"

"I always go to the Ship," he said. "No, thank you, I won't go upstairs."

"You are a most unsociable sort of brute!" said Lavender, frankly. "I shall paint a portrait of you some day, in the character of Diogenes, or Apemantus, or some one like that. I should like to do a portrait of you for Sheila —how pleased she would be! Will you take a glass of sherry?"

"No, thank you."

"Will you have a game at billiards?"

"No, thank you. You don't mean to say you would play billiards on such a day as this?"

"It *is* a fine day, isn't it?" said Lavender, turning to look at the sunlit road and the blue sea. "By the way, Sheila tells me you and she were out sailing this morning. It must have been very pleasant—especially for her, for she is mad about such things. What a curious girl she is, to be sure! Don't you think so?"

"I don't know what you mean by curious," said Ingram, coldly.

"Well, you know, strange—odd—unlike other people in her ways and her fancies. Did I tell you about my aunt taking her to see some friends of hers at Norwood? No? Well, Sheila had got out of the house somehow (I suppose their talking did not interest her), and when they went in search of her, they found her in the cemetery, crying like a child."

"What about?"

"Why," said Lavender, with a smile, "merely because so many people had died. She had never seen anything like that before—you know the small churchyards up in Lewis, with their inscriptions in Norwegian, and Danish, and German. I suppose the first sight of all the white stones at Norwood was too much for her."

"Well, I don't see much of a joke in that," said Ingram.

"Who said there was any joke in it?" cried Lavender, impatiently. "I never knew such a cantankerous fellow as you are. You are always fancying I am finding fault with Sheila. And I never do anything of the kind. She is a very good girl indeed. I have every reason to be satisfied with the way our marriage has turned out."

"*Has she?*"

The words were not important: but there was something in the tone in which they were spoken that suddenly checked Frank Lavender's careless flow of speech. He looked at Ingram for a moment, with some surprise, and then he said—

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I will tell you what I mean," said Ingram, slowly. "It is an awkward thing for a man to interfere between husband and wife, I am aware. He gets something else than thanks for his pains, ordinarily; but sometimes it has to be done, thanks or kicks. Now, you know, Lavender, I had a good deal to do with helping forward your marriage in the north; and I don't remind you of that to claim anything in the way of consideration, but to explain why I think I am called on to speak to you now."

Lavender was at once a little frightened and

a little irritated. He half guessed what might be coming from the slow and precise manner in which Ingram talked. That form of speech had vexed him many a time before; for he would rather have had any amount of wild contention, and bandying about of reproaches, than the calm, unimpassioned and sententious setting forth of his shortcomings to which this sallow little man was perhaps too much addicted.

"I suppose Sheila has been complaining to you, then?" said Lavender, coldly.

"You may suppose what you like," said Ingram, quietly; "but it would be a good deal better if you would listen to me patiently, and deal in a common-sense fashion with what I have got to say. It is nothing very desperate. Nothing has happened that is not of easy remedy; while the remedy would leave you and her in a much better position, both as regards your own estimation of yourselves, and the opinion of your friends."

"You are a little roundabout, Ingram," said Lavender, "and ornate. But I suppose all lectures begin so. Go on."

Ingram laughed.

"If I am too formal, it is because I don't want to make mischief by any exaggeration. Look here. A long time before you were mar

ried, I warned you that Sheila had very keen and sensitive notions about the duties that people ought to perform—about the dignity of labour—about the proper occupations of a man, and so forth. These notions you may regard as romantic and absurd, if you like; but you might as well try to change the colour of her eyes as attempt to alter any of her beliefs in that direction——"

"And she thinks that I am idle and indolent because I don't care what a washerwoman pays for her candles," said Lavender, with impetuous contempt. "Well, be it so. She is welcome to her opinion. But if she is grieved at heart because I can't make hobnailed boots, it seems to me that she might as well come and complain to myself, instead of going and detailing her wrongs to a third person, and calling for his sympathy in the character of an injured wife."

For an instant the dark eyes of the man opposite him blazed with a quick fire— for a sneer at Sheila was worse than an insult to himself; but he kept quite calm, and said

"That, unfortunately, is not what is troubling her——"

Lavender rose abruptly, took a turn up and down the empty room, and said—

"If there is anything the matter, I prefer to

hear it from herself. It is not respectful to me, that she should call in a third person to humour her whims and fancies——"

"Whims and fancies!" said Ingram, with that dark light returning to his eyes. "Do you know what you are talking about? Do you know that, while you are living upon the charity of a woman you despise, and dawdling about the skirts of another woman who laughs at you, you are breaking the heart of a girl who has not her equal in England? Whims and fancies! Good God! I wonder how she ever could have——"

He stopped, but the mischief was done. These were not prudent words to come from a man who wished to step in as mediator between husband and wife—perhaps they were as unjust as they were imprudent; but Ingram's blaze of wrath—kindled by what he considered the insufferable insolence of Lavender in thus speaking of Sheila—had swept all notions of prudence from it. Lavender, indeed, was much cooler than he was, and said, with an affectation of carelessness—

"I am sorry you should vex yourself so much about Sheila. One would think you had had the ambition yourself, at some time or other, to play the part of husband to her; and doubtless

then you would have made sure that all her idle fancies were gratified. As it is, I was about to relieve you from the trouble of further explanation by saying that I was quite competent to manage my own affairs; and that if Sheila has any complaint to make, she must make it to me."

Ingram rose, and was silent for a moment.

"Lavender," he said, "it does not matter much whether you and I quarrel—I was prepared for that, in any case. But I ask you to give Sheila a chance of telling you what I had intended to tell you."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the sort. I never invite confidences. When she wishes to tell me anything, she knows I am ready to listen. But I am quite satisfied with the position of affairs as they are at present."

"God help you, then," said his friend, and went away, scarcely daring to confess to himself how dark the future looked.

CHAPTER VII.

EXCHANGES.

Just as Frank Lavender went downstairs to meet Ingram, a letter which had been forwarded from London was brought to Sheila. It bore the Lewis postmark, and she guessed it was from Duncan, for she had told Mairi to ask the tall keeper to write, and she knew he would hasten to obey her request at any sacrifice of comfort to himself. Sheila sat down to read the letter in a happy frame of mind. She had every confidence that all her troubles were about to be removed now that her good friend Ingram had come to her husband; and here was a message to her from her home, that seemed, even before she read it, to beg of her to come thither, light-hearted and joyous. This was what she read:—

"Borvabost, the Island of Lews,
"*the third Aug.*, 18—.

"Honoured Mrs. Lavender,—It waz Mairi waz sayin that you will want me to write to you, bit I am not good at the writen whatever, and it waz 2 years since I waz writen to Amerika, to John Ferkason that kept the tea-shop in Stornoway, and was trooned in coming home the verra last year before this. It waz Mairi will say you will like a letter as well as any one that waz goin to Amerika, for the news and the things, and you will be as far away from us as if you waz living in Amerika or Glaska. But there is not much news, for the lads they hev all pulled up the boats, and they are away to Wick, and Sandy McDougal that waz living by Loch Langavat he will be going too, for he waz up at the sheilings when Mrs. Paterson's lasses waz there with the cows, and it waz Jeanie the youngest and him made it up, and he haz twenty-five pounds in the bank, which is a good thing too mirover for the young couple. It waz many a one waz sayin when the cows and the sheep waz come home from the sheilings that never afore waz Miss Sheila away from Loch Roag when the cattle would be swimmin across the loch to the island; and I will say to many of them verra

well you will wait and you will see Miss Sheila back again in the Lews and it wazna allwas you would lif away from your own home where you was born and the people will know you from the one year to the next. John McNicol of Habost he will be verra bad three months or two months ago, and we waz thinkin he will die, and him with a wife and five bairns too, and four cows and a cart, but the doctor took a great dale of blood from him, and he is now verra well whatever, though wakely on the legs. It would hev been a bad thing if Mr. McNicol was dead, for he will be verra good at pentin a door, and he haz between fifteen pounds and ten pounds in the bank at Stornoway, and four cows too and a cart, and he is a ferra religious man, and has great skill o the psalm-tunes, and he toesna get trunk now more as twice or as three times in the two weeks. It was his dochter Betsy, a verra fine lass, that waz come to Borvabost, and it waz the talk among many that Alister-nan-Each he waz thinkin of makin up to her, but there will be a great laugh all over the island, and she will be verra angry and say she will not have him no if his house had a door of silfer to it for she will hev ne one that toesna go to the Caithness fishins wi the other lads. It waz blew verra hard here the last night or two or three. There iss a great

deal of salmon in the rivers; and Mr. Mackenzie he will be going across to Grimersta, the day after to-morrow, or the next day before that, and the English gentlemen hev been there more as two or three weeks, and they will be getting verra good sport whatever. Mairi she will be writen a letter to you to-morrow, Miss Sheila, and she will be telling you all the news of the house. Mairi waz sayin she will be goin to London when the harvest was got in, and Scarlett will say to her that no one will let her land on the island again if she toesna bring you back with her to the island and to your own house. If it waz not too much trouble, Miss Sheila, it would be a proud day for Scarlett if you waz send me a line or two lines to say if you will be coming to the Lews this summer or before the winter is over whatever. I remain, Honoured Mrs. Lavender, your obedient servant,

"DUNCAN MACDONALD."

"This summer or winter," said Sheila to herself, with a happy light on her face; "why not now?" Why should she not go downstairs to the coffee-room of the hotel, and place this invitation in the hands of her husband and his friend? Would not its garrulous simplicity recall to both of them the island they used to find so pleasant?

Would not they suddenly resolve to leave behind them London and its ways and people, even this monotonous sea out there, and speed away northward till they came in sight of the great and rolling Minch, with its majestic breadth of sky and its pale blue islands lying far away at the horizon? Then the happy landing at Stornoway —her father, and Duncan, and Mairi all on the quay—the rapid drive over to Loch Roag, and the first glimpse of the rocky bays, and clear water, and white sand about Borva and Borvabost! And Sheila would once more—having cast aside this cumbrous attire that she had to change so often, and having got out that neat and simple costume that was so good for walking, or driving, or sailing—be proud to wait upon her guests, and help Mairi in her household ways, and have a pretty table ready for the gentlemen when they returned from the shooting.

Her husband came up the hotel stairs and entered the room. She rose to meet him, with the open letter in her hand.

"Sheila," he said (and the light slowly died away from her face), "I have something to ask of you."

She knew by the sound of his voice that she had nothing to hope: it was not the first time she had been disappointed, and yet this time it

seemed especially bitter somehow. The awakening from these illusions was sudden.

She did not answer, so he said, in the same measured voice—

"I have to ask that you will have henceforth no communication with Mr. Ingram; I do not wish him to come to the house."

She stood for a moment, apparently not understanding the meaning of what he said. Then, when the full force of this decision and request came upon her, a quick colour sprang to her face—the cause of which, if it had been revealed to him in words, would have considerably astonished her husband. But the moment of doubt, of surprise, of inward indignation, was soon over. She cast down her eyes, and said meekly—

"Very well, dear."

It was now his turn to be astonished, and mortified as well. He could not have believed it possible that she should so calmly acquiesce in the dismissal of one of her dearest friends. He had expected a more or less angry protest, if not a distinct refusal, which would have given him an opportunity for displaying the injuries he conceived himself to have suffered at their hands. Why had she not come to himself? This man Ingram was presuming on his ancient friendship,

and on the part he had taken in forwarding the marriage up in Borva. He had always, moreover, been somewhat too much of the schoolmaster—with his severe judgments, his sententious fashion of criticising and warning people, and his readiness to prove the whole world wrong in order to show himself to be right. All these and many other things Lavender meant to say to Sheila, so soon as she had protested against his forbidding Ingram to come any more to the house. But there was no protest. Sheila did not even seem surprised. She went back to her seat by the window, folded up Duncan's letter, and put it in her pocket; and then she turned to look at the sea.

Lavender regarded her for a moment, apparently doubting whether he should himself prosecute the subject; then he turned and left the room.

Sheila did not cry or otherwise seek to compassionate and console herself. Her husband had told her to do a certain thing; and she would do it. Perhaps she had been imprudent in having confided in Mr. Ingram; and, if so, it was right that she should be punished. But the regret and pain that lay deep in her heart was that Ingram should have suffered through her, and that she had no opportunity of telling

him that, though they might not see each other, she would never forget her friendship for him, or cease to be grateful to him for his unceasing and generous kindness to her.

Next morning Lavender was summoned to London by a telegram which announced that his aunt was seriously ill. He and Sheila got ready at once, left by a forenoon train, had some brief luncheon at home, and then went down to see the old lady in Kensington Gore. During their journey, Lavender had been rather more courteous and kindly towards Sheila than was his wont. Was he pleased that she had so readily obeyed him in this matter of giving up about the only friend she had in London? Or was he moved by some visitation of compunction? Sheila tried to show that she was grateful for his kindness; but there was that between them which could not be removed by chance phrases or attentions. Mrs. Lavender was in her own room. Paterson brought word that she wanted to see Sheila first and alone; so Lavender sat down in the gloomy drawing-room by the window, and watched the people riding and driving past, and the sunshine on the dusty green trees in the Park.

"Is Frank Lavender below?" said the thin old woman, who was propped up in bed, with

some scarlet garment around her that made her resemble more than ever the cockatoo of which Sheila had thought on first seeing her.

"Yes," said Sheila.

"I want to see you alone—I can't bear him dawdling about a room, and staring at things, and saying nothing. Does he speak to you?"

Sheila did not wish to enter into any controversy about the habits of her husband, so she said:

"I hope you will see him before he goes, Mrs. Lavender. He is very anxious to know how you are; and I am glad to find you looking so well. You do not look like an invalid at all."

"Oh, I'm not going to die yet," said the little dried old woman, with the harsh voice, the staring eyes, and the tightly-twisted grey hair. "I hope you didn't come to read the Bible to me—you wouldn't find one about in any case, I should think. If you like to sit down and read the sayings of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus, I should enjoy that; but I suppose you are too busy thinking what dress you'll wear at my funeral."

"Indeed I was thinking of no such thing," said Sheila, indignantly, but feeling all the same that the hard, glittering, expressionless eyes were watching her.

"Do you think I believe you?" said Mrs.

Lavender. "Bah! I hope I am able to recognize the facts of life. If you were to die this afternoon, I should get a black silk trimmed with crape the moment I got on my feet again, and go to your funeral in the ordinary way. I hope you will pay me the same respect. Do you think I am afraid to speak of these things?"

"Why should you speak of them?" said Sheila, despairingly.

"Because it does you good to contemplate the worst that can befall you; and if it does not happen, you may rejoice. And it will happen. I know that I shall be lying in this bed, with a half-a-dozen of you round about trying to cry, and wondering which will have the courage to turn and go out of the room first. Then there will be the funeral day, and Paterson will be careful about the blinds, and go about the house on her tip-toes, as if I were likely to hear! Then there will be a pretty service up in the cemetery, and a man who never saw me will speak of his dear sister departed; and then you'll all go home and have your dinner. Am I afraid of it?——"

"Why should you talk like that?" said Sheila, piteously. "You are not going to die. You distress yourself and others by thinking of these horrible things——"

"My dear child, there is nothing horrible in nature. Everything is part of the universal system which you should recognize and accept. If you had trained yourself now, by the study of philosophical works, to know how helpless you are to alter the facts of life, and how it is the best wisdom to be prepared for the worst, you would find nothing horrible in thinking of your own funeral. You are not looking well."

Sheila was startled by the suddenness of the announcement.

"Perhaps I am a little tired with the travelling we have done to-day."

"Is Frank Lavender kind to you?"

What was she to say, with those two eyes scanning her face?

"It is too soon to expect him to be anything else," she said, with an effort at a smile.

"Ah! So you are beginning to talk in that way? I thought you were full of sentimental notions of life when you came to London. It is not a good place for nurturing such things."

"It is not," said Sheila, surprised into a sigh.

"Come nearer. Don't be afraid I shall bite you. I am not so ferocious as I look."

Sheila rose and went closer to the bedside; and the old woman stretched out a lean and withered hand to her.

"If I thought that that silly fellow wasn't behaving well to you——"

"I will not listen to you," said Sheila, suddenly withdrawing her hand, while a quick colour leapt to her face; "I will not listen to you if you speak of my husband in that way."

"I will speak of him any way you like. Don't get into a rage. I have known Frank Lavender a good deal longer than you have. What I was going to say is this—that if I thought that he was not behaving well to you, I would play him a trick. I would leave my money, which is all he has got to live on, to you; and when I died he would find himself dependent on you for every farthing he wanted to spend."

And the old woman laughed—with very little of the weakness of an invalid in the look of her face. But Sheila, when she had mastered her surprise, and resolved not to be angry, said calmly—

"Whatever I have, whatever I might have, that belongs to my husband, not to me."

"Now you speak like a sensible girl," said Mrs. Lavender. "That is the misfortune of a wife, that she cannot keep her own money to herself. But there are means by which the law may be defeated, my dear. I have been thinking it over; I have been speaking of it to

Mr. Ingram ; for I have suspected for some time that my nephew, Mr. Frank, was not behaving himself."

"Mrs. Lavender," said Sheila, with a face too proud and indignant for tears, "you do not understand me. No one has the right to imagine anything against my husband, and to seek to punish him through me. And when I said that everything that I have belongs to him, I was not thinking of the law—no—but only this : that everything that I have, or might have, would belong to him, as I myself belong to him, of my own free will and gift ; and I would have no money, or anything else that was not entirely his."

"You are a fool."

"Perhaps," said Sheila, struggling to repress her tears.

"What if I were to leave every farthing of my property to a hospital? Where would Frank Lavender be then?"

"He could earn his own living without any such help," said Sheila, proudly : for she had never yet given up the hope that her husband would fulfil the fair promise of an earlier time, and win great renown for himself in striving to please her, as he had many a time vowed he would do.

"He has taken great care to conceal his powers in that way," said the old woman, with a sneer.

"And if he has, whose fault is it?" the girl said, warmly. "Who has kept him in idleness but yourself? And now you blame him for it. I wish he had never had any of your money—I wish he were never to have any more of it——"

And then Sheila stopped, with a terrible dread falling over her. What had she not said? The pride of her race had carried her so far, and she had given expression to all the tumult of her heart; but had she not betrayed her duty as a wife, and grievously compromised the interests of her husband? And yet the indignation in her bosom was too strong to admit of her retracting those fatal phrases, and begging forgiveness. She stood for a moment, irresolute; and she knew that the invalid was regarding her curiously, as though she were some wild animal, and not an ordinary resident in Bayswater.

"You are a little mad, but you are a good girl, and I want to be friends with you. You have in you the spirit of a dozen Frank Lavenders."

"You will never make friends with me by

speaking ill of my husband," said Sheila, with the same proud and indignant look.

"Not when he ill-uses you?"

"He does not ill-use me. What has Mr. Ingram been saying to you?"

The sudden question would certainly have brought about a disclosure, if any were to have been made; but Mrs. Lavender assured Sheila that Mr. Ingram had told her nothing, that she had been forming her own conclusions, and that she still doubted that they were right.

"Now sit down and read to me. You will find Marcus Antoninus on the top of those books."

"Frank is in the drawing-room," observed Sheila, mildly.

"He can wait," said the old woman, sharply.

"Yes, but you cannot expect me to keep him waiting," with a smile which did not conceal her very definite purpose.

"Then ring, and bid him come up. You will soon get rid of those absurd sentiments."

Sheila rang the bell, and sent Mrs. Paterson down for Lavender; but she did not betake herself to Marcus Antoninus. She waited a few minutes, and then her husband made his appearance, whereupon she sat down, and left to him the agreeable duty of talking with this

toothless old heathen about funerals and lingering death.

"Well, Aunt Lavender, I am sorry to hear you have been ill, but I suppose you are getting all right again, to judge by your looks."

"I am not nearly as ill as you expected."

"I wonder you did not say 'hoped'!" remarked Lavender, carelessly. "You are always attributing the most charitable feelings to your fellow-creatures."

"Frank Lavender," said the old lady, who was a little pleased by this bit of flattery, "if you came here to make yourself impertinent and disagreeable, you can go downstairs again. Your wife and I get on very well without you."

"I am glad to hear it," he said; "I suppose you have been telling her what is the matter with you."

"I have not. I don't know. I have had a pain in the head, and two fits, and I dare say the next will carry me off. The doctors won't tell me anything about it, so I suppose it is serious——"

"Nonsense!" cried Lavender. "Serious! To look at you, one would say you never had been ill in your life."

"Don't tell stories, Frank Lavender. I know I look like a corpse; but I don't mind it, for

I avoid the looking-glass, and keep the spectacle for my friends. I expect the next fit will kill me."

"I'll tell you what it is, Aunt Lavender; if you would only get up and come with us for a drive in the Park, you would find there was nothing of an invalid about you; and we should take you home to a quiet dinner at Notting Hill, and Sheila would sing to you all the evening, and to-morrow you would receive the doctors in state in your drawing-room, and tell them you were going for a month to Malvern."

"Your husband has a fine imagination, my dear," said Mrs. Lavender to Sheila. "It is a pity he puts it to no use. Now I shall let both of you go. Three breathing in this room are too many for the cubic feet of air it contains. Frank, bring over those scales and put them on the table; and send Paterson to me as you go out."

And so they went downstairs, and out of the house. Just as they stood on the steps, looking for a hansom, a young lad came forward, and shook hands with Lavender, glancing rather nervously at Sheila.

"Well, Mosenberg," said Lavender, "you've come back from Leipsic at last. We got your

card when we came home this morning from Brighton. Let me introduce you to my wife."

The boy looked at the beautiful face before him with something of distant wonder and reverence in his regard. Sheila had heard of the lad before—of the Mendelssohn that was to be—and liked his appearance at first sight. He was a rather handsome boy of fourteen or fifteen, of the fair Jew type, with large, dark expressive eyes, and long, wavy, light-brown hair. He spoke English fluently and well; his slight German accent was, indeed, scarcely so distinct as Sheila's Highland one; the chief peculiarity of his speaking being a preference for short sentences, as if he were afraid to venture upon elaborate English. He had not addressed a dozen sentences to Sheila before she had begun to have a liking for the lad; perhaps on account of his soft and musical voice; perhaps on account of the respectful and almost wondering admiration that dwelt in his eyes. He spoke to her as if she were some saint, who had but to smile to charm and bewilder the humble worshipper at her shrine.

"I was intending to call upon Mrs. Lavender, Madame," he said. "I heard that she was ill. Perhaps you can tell me if she is better."

"She seems to be very well to-day, and in very good spirits," Sheila answered.

"Then I will not go in. Did you propose to take a walk in the Park, Madame?"

Lavender inwardly laughed at the magnificent audacity of the lad; and, seeing that Sheila hesitated, humoured him by saying—

"Well, we were thinking of calling on one or two people before going home to dinner. But I haven't seen you for a long time, Mosenberg; and I want you to tell me how you succeeded at the Conservatoire. If you like to walk with us for a bit, we can give you something to eat at seven."

"That would be very pleasant for me," said the boy, blushing somewhat, "if it does not incommode you, Madame."

"Oh, no—I hope you will come," said Sheila, most heartily; and so they set out for a walk through Kensington Gardens northward.

Precious little did Lavender learn about Leipsic during that walk. The boy devoted himself wholly to Sheila. He had heard frequently of her, and he knew of her coming from the wild and romantic Hebrides; and he began to tell her of all the experiments that composers had made in representing the sound of seas, and storms, and winds howling through

caverns washed by the waves. Lavender liked music well enough, and could himself play and sing a little; but this enthusiasm rather bored him. He wanted to know if the yellow wine was still as cool and clear as ever down in the twilight of Auerbach's cellar, what burlesques had lately been played at the theatre, and whether such and such a beer-garden was still to the fore; whereas he heard only analyses of overtures, and descriptions of the uses of particular musical instruments, and a wild rhapsody about moonlit seas, the sweetness of French horns, the King of Thule, and a dozen other matters.

"Mosenberg," he said, "before you go calling on people, you ought to visit an English tailor. People will think you belong to a German band."

"I have been to a tailor," said the lad, with a frank laugh. "My parents, Madame, wish me to be quite English—that is why I am sent to live in London, while they are in Frankfort. I stay with some good friends of mine, who are very musical, and they are not annoyed by my practising, as other people would be."

"I hope you will sing something to us this evening," said Sheila.

"I will sing and play for you all the evening," he said lightly, "until you are tired. But you

must tell me when you are tired ; for who can tell how much music will be enough? Sometimes two or three songs are more than enough to make people wish you away."

"You, need have no fear of tiring me," said Sheila. "But when you are tired, I will sing for you."

"Yes, of course you sing, Madame," he said, casting down his eyes ; "I knew that when I saw you."

Sheila had got a sweetheart ; and Lavender saw it, and smiled good-naturedly. The awe and reverence with which this lad regarded the beautiful woman beside him were something new and odd in Kensington Gardens. Yet it was the way of those boys. He had himself had his imaginative fits of worship, in which some very ordinary young woman, who ate a good breakfast, and spent an hour and a half in arranging her hair before going out, was regarded as some beautiful goddess fresh risen from the sea, or descended from the clouds. Young Mosenberg was just at the proper age for these foolish dreams. He would sing songs to Sheila, and reveal to her that way of passion of which he dare not otherwise speak. He would compose pieces of music for her, and dedicate them to her, and spend half his quarterly money in having them printed. He

would grow to consider him, Lavender, a heartless brute, and cherish dark notions of poisoning him, but for the pain it might cause to her.

"I don't remember whether you smoke, Mosenberg," Lavender said, after dinner.

"Yes—a cigarette sometimes," said the lad; "but if Mrs. Lavender is going away, perhaps she will let me go into the drawing-room with her. There is that sonata of Muzio Clementi, Madame, which I will try to remember for you, if you please——"

"All right," said Lavender; "you'll find me in the next room on the left when you get tired of your music and want a cigar. I think you used to beat me at chess, didn't you?"

"I do not know. We will try once more to-night."

Then Sheila and he went into the drawing-room by themselves; and while she took a seat near the empty fire-place, he opened the piano at once, and sat down. He turned up his cuffs. He took a look at the pedals. He threw back his head, shaking his long brown hair. And then, with a crash like thunder, his two hands struck the keys. He had forgotten all about that sonata—it was a fantasia of his own, based on the airs in "Der Freischütz," that he played; and, as he played, Sheila's poor little

piano suffered somewhat. Never before had it been so battered about; and she wished the small chamber were a great hall, to temper the voluminous noise of this opening passage. But presently the music softened. The white, lithe fingers ran lightly over the keys, so that the notes seemed to ripple out like the prattling of a stream; and then again some stately and majestic air, or some joyous burst of song, would break upon this light accompaniment, and lead up to another roar and rumble of noise. It was a very fine performance, doubtless; but what Sheila remarked most was the enthusiasm of the lad. She was to see more of that.

"Now," he said, "that is nothing. It is to get one's fingers accustomed to the keys—you play anything that is loud and rapid. But if you please, Madame, shall I sing you something?"

"Yes, do," said Sheila.

"I will sing for you a little German song, which I believe Jenny Lind used to sing, but I never heard her sing. You know German?"

"Very little indeed."

"This is only the cry of some one, who is far away, about his sweetheart. It is very simple, both in the words and the music."

And he began to sing, in a voice so rich, so

tender, and expressive, that Sheila sat amazed and bewildered to hear him. Where had this boy caught such a trick of passion, or was it really a trick that threw into his voice all the pathos of a strong man's love and grief? He had a powerful baritone, of unusual compass, and rare sweetness; but it was not the finely-trained art of his singing, but the passionate abandonment of it, that thrilled Sheila, and indeed brought tears to her eyes. How had this mere lad learned all the yearning and despair of love, that he sang—

"Dir bebt die Brust
Dir schlägt dies Herz
Du meine Lust!
O du, mein Schmerz!
Nur an den Winden, den Sternen der Höh
Muss ich ver künden mein süsses Weh!"

as though his heart were breaking? When he had finished, he paused for a moment or two before leaving the piano; and then he came over to where Sheila sat. She fancied there was a strange look on his face, as of one who had been really experiencing the wild emotions of which he sang; but he said, in his ordinary careful way of speaking—

"Madame, I am sorry I cannot translate the

words for you into English. They are too simple; and they have, what is common in many German songs, a mingling of the pleasure and the sadness of being in love, that would not read natural perhaps in English. When he says to her that she is his greatest delight, and also his greatest grief, it is quite right in the German—but not in the English."

"But where have you learned all these things?" she said to him, talking to him as if he were a mere child, and looking without fear into his handsome boyish face and fine eyes. "Sit down and tell me. That is the song of some one whose sweetheart is far away, you said. But you sang it as if you yourself had some sweetheart far away."

"So I have, Madame," he said, seriously; "when I sing the song, I think of her then, so that I almost cry for her."

"And who is she?" said Sheila, gently. "Is she very far away?"

"I do not know," said the lad, absently. "I do not know who she is. Sometimes I think she is a beautiful woman away at St. Petersburg, singing in the opera-house there. Or I think she has sailed away in a ship from me——"

"But you do not sing about any particular

person?" said Sheila, with an innocent wonder appearing in her eyes.

"Oh no, not at all," said the boy; and then he added, with some suddenness, "Do you think, Madame, any fine songs like that, or any fine words, that go to the heart of people, are written about any one person? Oh, no! The man has a great desire in him to say something beautiful, or sad, and he says it—not to one person, but to all the world; and all the world takes it from him as a gift. Sometimes, yes, he will think of one woman, or he will dedicate the music to her, or he will compose it for her wedding, but the feeling in his heart is greater than any that he has for her. Can you believe, Madame, that Mendelssohn wrote the Hochzeitm—the Wedding-March—for any one wedding? No. It was all the marriage-joy of all the world he put into his music, and everyone knows that. And you hear it at this wedding, at that wedding, but you know it belongs to something far away and more beautiful than the marriage of any one bride with her sweetheart. And if you will pardon me, Madame, for speaking about myself; it is about some one I never knew, who is far more beautiful and precious to me than any one I ever knew, that I try to think when I sing these sad songs, and then I

think of her far away, and not likely ever to see me again."

"But some day, you will find that you have met her in real life," Sheila said. "And you will find her far more beautiful and kind to you than anything you dreamed about; and you will try to write your best music to give her. And then, if you should be unhappy, you will find how much worse is the real unhappiness about one you love than the sentiment of a song you can lay aside at any moment."

The lad looked at her.

"What can you know about unhappiness, Madame?" he said, with a frank and gentle simplicity that she liked.

"I?" said Sheila. "When people get married and begin to experience the cares of the world, they must expect to be unhappy sometimes."

"But not you," he said, with some touch of protest in his voice, as if it were impossible the world should deal harshly with so young, and beautiful, and tender a creature. "You can have nothing but enjoyment around you. Everyone must try to please you. You need only condescend to speak to people, and they are grateful to you for a great favour. Perhaps, Madame, you think I am impertinent——"

He stopped and blushed; while Sheila herself, with a little touch of colour, answered him, that she hoped he would always speak to her quite frankly, and then suggested that he might sing once more for her.

"Very well," he said, as he sat down to the piano; "this is not any more a sad song. It is about a young lady who will not let her sweetheart kiss her, except on conditions. You shall hear the conditions, and what he says."

Sheila began to wonder whether this innocent-eyed lad had been imposing on her. The song was acted as well as sung. It consisted chiefly of a dialogue between the two lovers; and the boy, with a wonderful ease and grace and skill, mimicked the shy coquetries of the girl, her fits of petulance and dictation, and the pathetic remonstrances of her companion, his humble entreaties, and his final sullenness, which is only conquered by her sudden and ample consent. "What a rare faculty of artistic representation this precocious boy must have," she thought, "if he really exhibits all those moods, and whims, and tricks of manner without having himself been in the position of the despairing and imploring lover!"

"You were not thinking of the beautiful lady in St. Petersburg when you were singing

now," Sheila said, on his coming back to her.

"Oh no," he said carelessly; "that is nothing. You have not to imagine anything. These people, you see them on every stage, in the comedies and farces."

"But that might happen in actual life," said Sheila, still not quite sure about him. "Do you know that many people would think you must have yourself been teased in that way, or you could not imitate it so naturally?"

"I! Oh no, Madame," he said, seriously, "I should not act that way, if I were in love with a woman. If I found her a comedy-actress, liking to make her amusement out of our relations, I should say to her, '*Good evening, Mademoiselle; we have both made a little mistake.*'"

"But you might be so much in love with her that you could not leave her without being very miserable."

"I might be very much in love with her, yes: but I would rather go away, and be miserable, than be humiliated by such a girl. Why do you smile, Madame? Do you think I am vain, or that I am too young to know anything about that? Perhaps both are true; but one cannot help thinking.'

"Well," said Sheila, with a grandly maternal air of sympathy and interest, "you must always remember this—that you have something more important to attend to than merely looking out for a beautiful sweetheart. That is the fancy of a foolish girl. You have your profession; and you must become great and famous in that; and then, some day, when you meet this beautiful woman, and ask her to be your wife, she will be bound to do that, and you will confer honour on her as well as secure happiness to yourself. Now, if you were to fall in love with some coquettish girl like her you were singing about, you would have no ambition to become famous; you would lose all interest in everything except her, and she would be able to make you miserable by a single word. When you have made a name for yourself, and got a good many more years, you will be better able to bear anything that happens to you in your love or in your marriage."

"You are very kind to take so much trouble," said young Mosenberg, looking up with big, grateful eyes. "Perhaps, Madame, if you are not very busy, during the day, you will let me call in sometimes; and if there is no one here, I will tell you about what I am doing, and play for you, or sing for you, if you please."

"In the afternoons I am always free," she said.

"Do you never go out," he asked.

"Not often. My husband is at his studio most of the day."

The boy looked at her, hesitated for a moment, and then, with a sudden rush of colour to his face—

"You should not stay so much in the house. Will you sometimes go for a little walk with me, Madame, to Kensington Gardens, if you are not busy in the afternoon?"

"Oh, certainly," said Sheila, without a moment's embarrassment. "Do you live near them?"

"No, I live in Sloane-street; but the underground railway brings me here in a very short time."

That mention of Sloane-street gave a twinge to Sheila's heart. Ought she to have been so ready to accept offers of new friendship just as her old friend had been banished from her?

"In Sloane-street? Do you know Mr. Ingram?"

"Oh yes, very well. Do you?"

"He is one of my oldest friends," said Sheila, bravely: she would not acknowledge that their intimacy was a thing of the past.

"He is a very good friend to me—I know that," said young Mosenberg, with a laugh. "He hired a piano, merely because I used to go into his rooms at night; and now he makes me play over all my most difficult music when I go in, and he sits and smokes a pipe, and pretends to like it. I do not think he does; but I have got to do it all the same; and then, afterwards, I sing for him some songs that I know he likes. Madame, I think I can surprise you."

He went suddenly to the piano, and began to sing, in a very quiet way—

"O soft be thy slumbers, by Tigh-na-linne's waters,
Thy late-wake was sung by MacDiarmid's fair daughters,
But far in Lochaber the true heart was weeping,
Whose hopes are entombed in the grave where thou'rt sleeping."

It was the lament of the young girl whose lover had been separated from her by false reports, and who died before he could get back to Lochaber when the deception was discovered. And the wild, sad air that the girl is supposed to sing seemed so strange with those new chords that this boy-musician gave it, that Sheila sat and listened to it as though it were the sound of the seas about Borva coming to her with a new voice and finding her altered and a stranger.

"I know nearly all of those Highland songs that Mr. Ingram has got," said the lad.

"I did not know he had any," Sheila said.

"Sometimes he tries to sing one himself," said the boy, with a smile, "but he does not sing very well, and he gets vexed with himself in fun, and flings things about the room. But you will sing some of those songs, Madame, and let me hear how they are sung in the North?"

"Some time," said Sheila; "I would rather listen just now to all you can tell me about Mr. Ingram—he is such a very old friend of mine, and I do not know how he lives."

The lad speedily discovered that there was at least one way of keeping his new and beautiful acquaintance profoundly interested; and, indeed, he went on talking until Lavender came into the room, in evening dress. It was eleven o'clock; and young Mosenberg started up with a thousand apologies and hopes that he had not detained Mrs. Lavender. No, Mrs. Lavender was not going out; her husband was going round for an hour to a ball that Mrs. Kavanagh was giving, but she preferred to stay at home.

"May I call upon you to-morrow afternoon, Madame?" said the boy, as he was leaving.

"I shall be very glad if you will," Sheila answered.

And as he went along the pavement, young Mosenberg observed to his companion that Mrs. Lavender did not seem to have gone out much, and that it was very good of her to have promised to go with him occasionally into Kensington Gardens.

"Oh, has she?" said Lavender.

"Yes," said the lad, with some surprise.

"You are lucky to be able to get her to leave the house," her husband said; "I can't."

Perhaps he had not tried so much as the words seemed to imply.

CHAPTER VIII.

GUESSES.

"Mr. Ingram," cried young Mosenberg, bursting into the room of his friend, "do you know that I have seen your Princess from the island of the Atlantic? Yes, I met her yesterday, and I went up to the house, and I dined there, and spent all the evening there."

Ingram was not surprised, nor, apparently, much interested. He was cutting open the leaves of a quarterly review, and a freshly-filled pipe lay on the table beside him. A fire had been lit, more for cheerfulness than warmth: the shutters were shut; there was some whisky on the table; so that this small apartment seemed to have its share of bachelor's comforts.

"Well," said Ingram, quietly, "did you play for her?"

"Yes."

"And sing for her, too?"

"Yes."

"Did you play and sing your very best for her?"

"Yes, I did. But I have not told you half yet. This afternoon I went up; and she went out for a walk with me; and we went down through Kensington Gardens, and all around by the Serpentine——"

"Did she go into that parade of people?" said Ingram, looking up with some surprise.

"No," said the lad, looking rather crestfallen, for he would have liked to have shown off Sheila to some of his friends; "she would not go—she preferred to watch the small boats on the Serpentine; and she was very kind, too, in speaking to the children, and helping them with their boats, although some people stared at her. And what is more than all these things, to-morrow night she comes with me to a concert in the St. James's Hall—yes."

"You are very fortunate," said Ingram, with a smile, for he was well pleased to hear that Sheila had taken a fancy to the boy, and was likely to find his society amusing. "But you have not told me yet what you think of her."

"What I think of her!" said the lad, pausing in a bewildered way, as if he could find no words to express his opinion of Sheila. And then he

said, suddenly, "*I think she is like the Mother of God.*"

"You irreverent young rascal!" said Ingram, lighting his pipe, "how dare you say such a thing?"

"I mean in the pictures—in the tall pictures you see in some churches abroad, far up in a half-darkness. She has the same sweet, compassionate look, and her eyes are sometimes a little sad; and when she speaks to you, you think you have known her for a long time, and that she wishes to be very kind to you. But she is not a Princess at all, as you told me. I expected to find her grand, haughty, wilful, yes; but she is much too friendly for that, and when she laughs, you see she could not sweep about a room, and stare at people. But if she was angry, or proud —perhaps then——"

"See you don't make her angry, then," said Ingram. "Now go and play over all you were practising in the morning. No!—stop a bit. Sit down and tell me something more about your experiences of Shei—of Mrs. Lavender."

Young Mosenberg laughed, and sat down.

"Do you know, Mr. Ingram, that the same thing occurred yesterday night, I was about to sing some more, or I was asking Mrs. Lavender to sing some more—I forget which—but she said

to me, "*Not just now. I wish you to sit down and tell me all you know about Mr. Ingram.*"

"And she no sooner honours you with her confidence than you carry it to everyone!" said Ingram, somewhat fearful of the boy's tongue.

"Oh, as to that," said the lad, delighted to see that his friend was a little embarrassed. "As to that, I believe she is in love with you."

"Mosenberg," said Ingram, with a flash of anger in his dark eyes, "if you were half-a-dozen years older, I would thrash the life out of you. Do you think that is a pretty sort of joke to make about a woman? Don't you know the mischief your gabbling tongue might make; for how is everyone to know that you are talking merely impertinent nonsense?"

"Oh," said the boy, audaciously, "I did not mean anything of the kind you see in comedies or in operas, breaking up marriages, and causing duels! Oh, no. I think she is in love with you as I am in love with her: and I am, ever since yesterday."

"Well, I will say this for you," remarked Ingram, slowly, "that you are the cheekiest young beggar I have the pleasure to know. You are in love with her, are you? A lady admits you to her house, is particularly kind to you,

talks to you in confidence, and then you go and tell people that you are in love with her!"

"I did not tell people so," said Mosenberg, flushing under the severity of the reproof; "I told you only, and I thought you would understand what I meant. I should have told Lavender himself just as soon, yes!—only he would not care."

"How do you know?"

"Bah!" said the boy, impatiently. "Cannot one see it? You have a pretty wife—much prettier than anyone you would see at a ball at Mrs. Kavanagh's—and you leave her at home, and you go to the ball to amuse yourself."

This boy, Ingram perceived, was getting to see too clearly how matters stood. He bade him go and play some music, having first admonished him gravely about the necessity of keeping some watch and ward over his tongue. Then the pipe was re-lit; and a fury of sound arose at the other end of the room.

So Lavender, forgetful of the true-hearted girl who loved him, forgetful of his own generous instincts, forgetful of the future that his fine abilities promised, was still dangling after this alien woman; and Sheila was left at home, with her troubles and piteous yearnings and fancies as her only companions. Once upon a time, Ingram

could have gone straight up to him, and admonished him, and driven him to amend his ways. But now that was impossible.

What was still possible? One wild project occurred to him for a moment, but he laughed at it, and dismissed it. It was that he should go boldly to Mrs. Lorraine herself, ask her plainly if she knew what cruel injury she was doing to this young wife, and force her to turn Lavender adrift. But what enterprise of the days of old romance could be compared with this mad proposal? To ride up to a castle, blow a trumpet, and announce that unless a certain lady were released forthwith, death and destruction would begin—all that was simple enough, easy and according to rule; but to go into a lady's drawing-room, without an introduction, and request her to stop a certain flirtation—that was a much more awful undertaking. But Ingram could not altogether dismiss this notion from his head. Mosenberg went on playing no longer his practising-pieces, but all manner of airs which he knew Ingram liked; while the small sallow man with the brown beard lay in his easy-chair, and smoked his pipe, and gazed attentively at his toes on the fender.

"You know Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter, don't you, Mosenberg?" he said, during an interval in the music.

"Not much," said the boy. "They were in England only a little while before I went to Leipsic."

"I should like to know them."

"That is very easy. Mr. Lavender will introduce you to them. Mrs. Lavender said he went there very much."

"What would they do, do you think, if I went up and asked to see them?"

"The servant would ask if it was about beer or coals that you called."

A man will do much for a woman who is his friend; but to be suspected of being a brewer's traveller, to have to push one's way into a strange drawing-room, to have to confront the awful stare of the inmates, and then to have to deliver a message which they will probably consider as the very extreme of audacious and meddling impertinence! The prospect was not pleasant; and yet Ingram, as he sat and thought over it that evening, finally resolved to encounter all these dangers and wounds. He could help Sheila in no other way. He was banished from her house. Perhaps he might induce this American girl to release her captive, and give Lavender back to his own wife. What were a few twinges of one's self-respect, or risks of a humiliating failure, compared with the pos-

sibility of befriending Sheila in some small way?

Next morning he went early in to Whitehall; and about one o'clock started off for Holland Park. He wore a tall hat, a black frock-coat, and yellow kid gloves. He went in a hansom, so that the person who opened the door should know that he was not a brewer's traveller. In this wise he reached Mrs. Kavanagh's house, which Lavender had frequently pointed out to him in passing, about half-past one, and, with some internal tremors, but much outward calmness, went up the broad stone steps.

A small boy in buttons opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Lorraine at home?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy.

It was the simplest thing in the world. In a couple of seconds he found himself in a big drawing-room; and the youth had taken his card upstairs. Ingram was not very sure whether his success, so far, was due to the hansom, or to his tall hat, or to a silver-headed cane which his grandfather had brought home from India. However, here he was in the house, just like the hero of one of those fine old farces of our youth, who jumps from the street into a strange drawing-room, flirts with the maid, hides behind a screen, confronts the master, and marries his

daughter all in half an hour, the most exacting unities of time and place being faithfully observed.

Presently the door was opened, and a young lady, pale and calm and sweet of face, approached him, and not only bowed to him, but held out her hand.

"I have much pleasure in making your acquaintance, Mr. Ingram," she said, gently, and somewhat slowly. "Mr. Lavender has frequently promised to bring you to see us; for he has spoken to us so much about you, that we had begun to think we already knew you. Will you come with me upstairs that I may introduce you to Mamma?"

Ingram had come prepared to state harsh truths bluntly, and was ready to meet any sort of anger or opposition with a perfect frankness of intention. But he certainly had not come prepared to find the smart-tongued and fascinating American widow of whom he had heard so much, a quiet, self-possessed, and gracious young lady, of singularly winning manners, and clear and resolutely honest eyes. Had Lavender been quite accurate or even conscientious in his garrulous talk about Mrs. Lorraine?

"If you will excuse me," said Ingram, with a smile that had less of embarrassment about it

than he could have expected, "I would rather speak to you for a few minutes first. The fact is, I have come on a self-imposed errand; and that must be my apology for—for thrusting myself——"

"I am sure no apology is needed," said the girl. "We have always been expecting to see you. Will you sit down?"

He put his hat and his cane on the table; and as he did so, he recorded a mental resolution not to be led away by the apparent innocence and sweetness of this woman. What a fool he had been, to expect her to appear in the guise of some forward and giggling coquette, as if Frank Lavender, with all his faults, could have suffered anything like coarseness of manners! But was this woman any the less dangerous that she was refined and courteous, and had the speech and bearing of a gentlewoman?

"Mrs. Lorraine," he said, lowering his eyebrows somewhat, "I may as well be frank with you. I have come upon an unpleasant errand —an affair, indeed, which ought to be no business of mine; but sometimes, when you care a little for some one, you don't mind running the risk of being treated as an intermeddler. You know that I know Mrs. Laven-

der. She is an old friend of mine. She was almost a child when I knew her first; and I still have a sort of notion that she is a child, and that I should look after her, and so—and so——"

She sat quite still. There was no surprise, no alarm, no anger, when Sheila's name was mentioned. She was merely attentive; but now, seeing that he hesitated, she said—

"I do not know what you have to say; but if it is serious, may not I ask Mamma to join us?"

"If you please, no. I would rather speak with you alone, as this matter concerns yourself only. Well, the fact is, I have seen for some time back that Mrs. Lavender is very unhappy; she is left alone; she knows no one in London; perhaps she does not care to join much in those social amusements that her husband enjoys. I say this poor girl is an old friend of mine; I cannot help trying to do something to make her less wretched; and so I have ventured to come to you to see if you could not assist me. Mr. Lavender comes very much to your house; and Sheila is left all by herself; and doubtless she begins to fancy that her husband is neglectful, perhaps indifferent to her, and may get to imagine things that are quite wrong, you know, and that could be explained away by a little kindness on your part."

Was this, then, the fashion in which Jonah had gone up to curse the wickedness of Nineveh? As he had spoken, he had been aware that those sincere, somewhat matter-of-fact, and far from unfriendly eyes that were fixed on him had undergone no change whatever. Here was no vile creature who would start up, with a guilty conscience, to repel the remotest hint of an accusation; and indeed, quite unconsciously to himself, he had been led on to ask for her help. Not that he feared her. Not that he could not have said the harshest things to her which there was any reason for saying. But somehow there seemed to be no occasion for the utterance of any cruel truths.

The wonder of it was, too, that instead of being wounded, indignant, and angry, as he had expected her to be, she betrayed a very friendly interest in Sheila, as though she herself had nothing whatever to do with the matter.

"You have undertaken a very difficult task, Mr. Ingram," she said, with a smile. "I don't think there are many married ladies in London who have a friend who would do as much for them. And, to tell you the truth, both my mamma and myself have come to the same conclusion as yourself about Mr. Lavender. It is really too bad, the way in which he allows that pretty

young thing to remain at home ; for I suppose she would go more into society if he were to coax her and persuade her. We have done what we could, in sending her invitations, in calling on her, and in begging Mr. Lavender to bring her with him. But he has always some excuse for her, so that we never see her. And yet I am sure he does not mean to give her pain ; for he is very proud of her, and madly extravagant wherever she is concerned, and sometimes he takes sudden fits of trying to please her and be kind to her that are quite odd in their way. Can you tell me what we should do ? "

Ingram looked at her for a moment, and said, gravely and slowly—

" Before we talk any more about that, I must clear my conscience. I believe that I have done you a wrong. I came here prepared to accuse you of drawing away Mr. Lavender from his wife, of seeking amusement and perhaps some social distinction by keeping him continually dangling after you ; and I meant to reproach you, or even threaten you, until you promised never to see him again."

A quick flush, partly of shame and partly of annoyance, sprang to the fair and pale face ; but she answered, calmly—

" It is perhaps as well that you did not tell

me this a few minutes ago. May I ask what has led you to change your opinion of me, if it has changed?"

"Of course it has changed," he said, promptly and emphatically. "I can see that I did you a great injury; and I apologize for it, and beg your forgiveness. But when you ask me what has led me to change my opinion, what am I to say? Your manner, perhaps, more than what you have said, has convinced me that I was wrong."

"Perhaps you are again mistaken," she said, coldly; "you get rapidly to conclusions."

"The reproof is just," he said. "You are quite right. I have made a blunder; there is no mistake about it."

"But do you think it was fair," she said, with some spirit, "do you think it was fair to believe all this harm about a woman you had never seen? Now, listen. A hundred times I have begged Mr. Lavender to be more attentive to his wife—not in these words, of course, but as directly as I could. Mamma has given parties, made arrangements for visits, drives, and all sorts of things, to tempt Mrs. Lavender to come to us, and all in vain. Of course, you can't thrust yourself on anyone like that. Though Mamma and myself like Mrs. Lavender very

well, it is asking too much that we should encounter the humiliation of intermeddling——"

Here she stopped suddenly, with the least show of embarrassment. Then she said, frankly—

"You are an old friend of hers. It is very good of you to have risked so much for the sake of that girl. There are very few gentlemen whom one meets who would do as much."

Ingram could say nothing, and was a little impatient with himself. Was he to be first reproved, and then treated with an indulgent kindness, by a mere girl?

"Mamma," said Mrs. Lorraine, as an elderly lady entered the room, "let me introduce to you Mr. Ingram, whom you must already know. He proposes we should join in some conspiracy to inveigle Mrs. Lavender into society, and make the poor little thing amuse herself."

"Little!" said Mrs. Kavanagh, with a smile; "she is a good deal taller than you are, my dear. But I am afraid, Mr. Ingram, you have undertaken a hopeless task. Will you stay to luncheon, and talk it over with us?"

"I hope you will," said Mrs. Lorraine; and naturally enough he consented.

Luncheon was just ready. As they were going into the room on the opposite side of the hall, the younger lady said to Ingram, in

a quiet undertone, but with much indifference of manner—

"You know, if you think I ought to give up Mr. Lavender's acquaintance altogether, I will do so at once. But perhaps that will not be necessary."

So this was the house in which Sheila's husband spent so much of his time; and these were the two ladies of whom so much had been said and surmised. There were three of Lavender's pictures on the walls of the dining-room; and as Ingram inadvertently glanced at them, Mrs. Lorraine said to him—

"Don't you think it is a pity Mr. Lavender should continue drawing those imaginative sketches of heads? I do not think, myself, that he does himself justice in that way. Some bits of landscape, now, that I have seen, seemed to me to have quite a definite character about them, and promised far more than anything else of his I have seen."

"That is precisely what I think," said Ingram, partly amused and partly annoyed to find that this girl, with her clear grey eyes, her soft and musical voice, and her singular delicacy of manner, had an evil trick of saying the very things he would himself have said, and leaving him with nothing but a helpless "yes."

"I think he ought to have given up his club when he married. Most English gentlemen do that when they marry, do they not?" said Mrs. Kavanagh.

"Some," said Ingram. "But a good deal of nonsense is talked about the influence of clubs in that way. It is really absurd to suppose that the size or the shape of a building can alter a man's moral character——"

"It does, though," said Mrs. Lorraine, confidently. "I can tell directly if a gentleman has been accustomed to spend his time in clubs. When he is surprised, or angry, or impatient, you can perceive blanks in his conversation, which in a club, I suppose, would be filled up. Don't you know poor old Colonel Hannen's way of talking, Mamma? This old gentleman, Mr. Ingram, is very fond of speaking to you about political liberty, and the rights of conscience; and he generally becomes so confused that he gets vexed with himself, and makes odd pauses, as if he were invariably addressing himself in very rude language indeed. Sometimes you would think he was like a railway-engine, going blindly and helplessly on through a thick and choaking mist; and you can see that, if there were no ladies present, he would let off a few crackers—fog-signals, as it were—just to

bring himself up a bit, and let people know where he was. Then he will go on again, talking away, until you fancy yourself in a tunnel, with a throbbing noise in your ears, and all the daylight shut out, and you perhaps getting to wish that on the whole you were dead."

"Cecilia!"

"I beg your pardon, Mamma," said the younger lady, with a quiet smile; "you look so surprised, that Mr. Ingram will give me credit for not often erring in that way. You look as though a hare had turned and attacked you."

"That would give most people a fright," said Ingram, with a laugh. He was rapidly forgetting the object of his mission. The almost childish softness of voice of this girl, and the perfect composure with which she uttered little sayings that showed considerable sharpness of observation, and a keen enjoyment of the grotesque, had an odd sort of fascination for him. He totally forgot that Lavender had been fascinated by it too. If he had been reminded of the fact at this moment, he would have said that the boy had, as usual, got sentimental about a pretty pair of big grey eyes and fine profile, while he, Ingram, was possessed by nothing but

a purely intellectual admiration of certain fine qualities of brightness, sincerity of speech, and womanly shrewdness.

Luncheon, indeed, was over before any mention was made of the Lavenders; and when they returned to that subject, it appeared to Ingram that their relations had in the meantime got to be very friendly, and that they were really discussing this matter as if they formed a little family conclave.

"I have told Mr. Ingram, Mamma," Mrs. Lorraine said, "that so far as I am concerned, I will do whatever he thinks I ought to do. Mr. Lavender has been a friend of ours for some time; and of course he cannot be treated with rudeness or incivility; but if we are wounding the feelings of anyone by asking him to come here—and he certainly has visited us pretty often—why, it would be easy to lessen the number of his calls. Is that what we should do, Mr. Ingram? You would not have us quarrel with him?"

"Especially," said Mrs. Kavanagh, with a smile, "that there is no certainty he will spend more of his time with his wife merely because he spends less of it here. And yet I fancy he is a very good-natured man."

"He *is* very good-natured," said Ingram, with

decision. "I have known him for years, and I know that he is exceedingly unselfish, that he would do ridiculously generous things to serve a friend, and that a better-intentioned fellow does not breathe in the world. But he is, at times, I admit, very thoughtless and inconsiderate——"

"That sort of good-nature," said Mrs. Lorraine, in her gentlest voice, "is very good in its way, but rather uncertain. So long as it shines in one direction, it is all right, and quite trustworthy; for you want a hard brush to brush sunlight off a wall. But when the sunlight shifts, you know——"

"The wall is left in the cold. Well," said Ingram, "I am afraid it is impossible for me to dictate to you what you ought to do. I do not wish to draw you into any interference between husband and wife, or even to let Mr. Lavender know that you think he is not treating Shei—Mrs. Lavender—properly. But if you were to hint to him that he ought to pay some attention to her—that he should not be going everywhere as if he were a young bachelor in chambers; if you would discourage his coming to see you without bringing her also, and so forth—surely he would see what you mean. Perhaps I ask too much of you; but I had intended to ask more.

The fact is, Mrs. Kavanagh, I had done your daughter the injustice of supposing——"

"I thought we had agreed to say no more about that," said Mrs. Lorraine, quickly; and Ingram was silent.

Half an hour thereafter he was walking back through Holland Park, through the warm light of an autumn afternoon. The place seemed much changed since he had seen it a couple of hours before. The double curve of big houses had a more friendly and hospitable look; the very air seemed to be more genial and comfortable since he had driven up here in the hansom.

Perhaps Mr. Ingram was at this moment a little more perturbed, pleased, and bewildered than he would have liked to confess. He had discovered a great deal in these two hours; been much surprised and fascinated; and had come away fairly stupefied with the result of his mission. He had, indeed, been successful: Lavender would now find a different welcome awaiting him in the house in which he had been spending nearly all his time, to the neglect of his wife. But the fact is, that as Edward Ingram went rapidly over in his own mind everything that had occurred since his entrance into that house; as he anxiously recalled the remarks made to him, the tone and looks accompanying

them, and his own replies, it was not of Lavender's affairs alone that he thought. He confessed to himself frankly that he had never yet met any woman who had so surprised him into admiration on their first meeting.

Yet what had she said? Nothing very particular. Was it in the bright intelligence of the grey eyes, that seemed to see everything he meant with an instant quickness, and that seemed to agree with him even before he spoke? He reflected, now that he was in the open air, that he must have persecuted these two women dreadfully. In getting away from Lavender's affairs, they had touched on pictures, books, and what not—on all sorts of topics, indeed, except those which, as Ingram had anticipated, such a creature as Mrs. Lorraine would naturally have found interesting. And he had to confess to himself that he had lectured his two helpless victims most unmercifully. He was quite conscious that he sometimes laid down the law in an authoritative and even sententious manner. On first going into the house, certain things said by Mrs. Lorraine had almost surprised him into a mood of mere acquiescence; but after luncheon he had assumed his ordinary manner of tutor in general to the universe, and had informed those two women, in a distinct fashion, what their

opinions ought to be on half the social conundrums of the day.

He now reflected, with much compunction, that this was highly improper. He ought to have asked about flower-shows; and inquired whether the Princess of Wales was looking well of late. Some reference to the last Parisian comedy might have introduced a disquisition on the new greys and greens of the French milliners, with a passing mention made of the price paid for a pair of ponies by a certain Marquise unattached. He had not spoken of one of these things: perhaps he could not, if he had tried. He remembered, with an awful consciousness of guilt, that he had actually discoursed of woman suffrage, of the public conscience of New York, of the extirpation of the Indians, and a dozen different things, not only taking no heed of any opinions that his audience of two might hold, but insisting on their accepting his opinions as the expression of absolute and incontrovertible truth.

He became more and more dissatisfied with himself. If he could only go back, now, he would be much more wary, more submissive and complaisant, more anxious to please. What right had he to abuse the courtesy and hospitality of these two strangers, and lecture them on the

Constitution of their own country? He was annoyed beyond expression that they had listened to him with so much patience.

And yet he could not have seriously offended them; for they had earnestly besought him to dine with them on the following Tuesday evening, to meet an American judge; and, when he had consented, Mrs. Lorraine had written down on a card the date and hour, lest he should forget. He had that card in his pocket: surely he could not have offended them? If he had pursued this series of questions, he might have gone on to ask himself why he should be so anxious not to have offended these two new friends. He was not ordinarily very sensitive to the opinions that might be formed of him—more especially by persons living out of his own sphere, with whom he was not likely to associate. He did not, indeed, as a general rule, suffer himself to be perturbed about anything; and yet, as he went along the busy thoroughfare at this moment, he was conscious that rarely in his life had he been so ill at ease.

Something now occurred that startled him out of his reverie. Communing with himself, he was staring blankly ahead, taking little note of the people whom he saw. But somehow, in a vague and dream-like way, he seemed to become aware

that there was some one in front of him—a long way ahead as yet—whom he knew. He was still thinking of Mrs. Lorraine, and unconsciously postponing the examination of this approaching figure, or rather pair of figures, when, with a sudden start, he found Sheila's sad and earnest eyes fixed upon him. He woke up as from a dream. He saw that young Mosenberg was with her; and naturally the boy would have approached Ingram, and stopped, and spoken. But Ingram paid no attention to him. He was, with a quick pang at his heart, regarding Sheila, with the knowledge that on her rested the cruel decision as to whether she should come forward to him or not. He was not aware that her husband had forbidden her to have any communication with him; yet he had guessed as much, partly from his knowledge of Lavender's impatient disposition, and partly from the glance he caught of her eyes when he woke up from his trance.

Young Mosenberg turned with surprise to his companion. She was passing on; he did not even see that she had bowed to Ingram, with a face flushed with shame and pain, and with eyes cast down. Ingram, too, was passing on, without even shaking hands with her, or uttering a word. Mosenberg was too bewildered to attempt

any protest; he merely followed Sheila, with a conviction that something desperate had occurred, and that he would best consult her feelings by making no reference to it.

But that one look that the girl had directed to her old friend, before she bowed and passed on, had filled him with dismay and despair. It was somehow like the piteous look of a wounded animal, incapable of expressing its pain. All thoughts and fancies of his own little vexations or embarrassments were instantly banished from him; he could only see before him those sad and piteous eyes, full of kindness to him, he thought, and of grief that she should be debarred from speaking to him, and of resignation to her own lot.

Gwdyr House did not get much work out of him that day. He sat in a small room in a back part of the building, looking out on a lonely little square, silent and ruddy with the reflected light of the sunset.

"A hundred Mrs. Lorraines," he was thinking to himself, bitterly enough, "will not save my poor Sheila. She will die of a broken heart. I can see it in her face. And it is I who have done it—from first to last it is I who have done it; and now I can do nothing to help her."

That became the burden and refrain of all his

reflections. It was he who had done this frightful thing. It was he who had taken away the young Highland girl—his good Sheila—from her home; and ruined her life and broken her heart. And he could do nothing to help her.

CHAPTER IX.

SHEILA'S STRATAGEM.

"We met Mr. Ingram to-day," said young Mosenberg, ingenuously.

He was dining with Lavender, not at home, but at a certain club in St. James's Street; and either his curiosity was too great, or he had forgotten altogether Ingram's warnings to him that he should hold his tongue.

"Oh, did you?" said Lavender, showing no great interest. "Waiter, some French mustard. What did Ingram say to you?"

The question was asked with much apparent indifference; and the boy stared.

"Well," he said, at length, "I suppose there is some misunderstanding between Mrs. Lavender and Mr. Ingram, for they both saw each other, and they both passed on without speaking; I was very sorry, yes. I thought they were friends. I thought Mr. Ingram knew

Mrs. Lavender even before you did; but they did not speak to each other, not one word."

Lavender was in one sense pleased to hear this. He liked to hear that his wife was obedient to him. But, he said to himself, with a sharp twinge of conscience, she was carrying her obedience too far. He had never meant that she should not even speak to her old friend. He would show Sheila that he was not unreasonable. He would talk to her about it as soon as he got home, and in as kindly a way as was possible.

Mosenberg did not play billiards, but they remained late in the billiard-room, Lavender playing pool, and getting out of it rather successfully. He could not speak to Sheila that night; but next morning, before going out, he did.

"Sheila," he said, "Mosenberg told me last night that you met Mr. Ingram, and did not speak to him. Now, I didn't mean anything like that You must not think me unreasonable. All I want is, that he shall not interfere with our affairs and try to raise some unpleasantness between you and me, such as might arise from the interference of even the kindest of friends. When you meet him outside, or at anyone's house, I hope you will speak to him just as usual." Sheila replied, calmly —

"If I am not allowed to receive Mr. Ingram here, I cannot treat him as a friend elsewhere. I would rather not have friends whom I can only speak to in the streets."

"Very well," said Lavender, wincing under the rebuke, but fancying that she would soon repent her of this resolve. In the meantime, if she would have it so, she should have it so.

So that was an end of this question of Mr. Ingram's interference for the present. But very soon—in a couple of days, indeed—Lavender perceived the change that had been wrought in the house in Holland Park to which he had been accustomed to resort.

"Cecilia," Mrs. Kavanagh had said, on Ingram's leaving, "you must not be rude to Mr. Lavender."

She knew the perfect independence of that gentle young lady, and was rather afraid it might carry her too far.

"Of course I shall not be, Mamma," Mrs Lorraine had said. "Did you ever hear of such a courageous act as that man coming up to two strangers and challenging them all on behalf of a girl married to some one else? You know that was the meaning of his visit. He thought I was flirting with Mr. Lavender, and keeping him from his wife. I wonder how many men there are in

London who would have walked twenty yards to help in such a matter."

"My dear, he may have been in love with that pretty young lady before she was married."

"Oh no," said the clear-eyed daughter, quietly, but quite confidently. "He would not be so ready to show his interest in her, if that were so. Either he would be modest, and ashamed of his rejection; or vain, and attempt to make a mystery about it."

"Perhaps you are right," said the mother: she seldom found her daughter wrong on such points.

"I am sure I am right, Mamma. He talks about her as fondly, and frequently, and openly, as a man might talk about his own daughter. Besides, you can see he is talking honestly. That man couldn't deceive a child if he were to try. You see everything in his face."

"You seem to have been much interested in him," said Mrs. Kavanagh, with no appearance of sarcasm.

"Well, I don't think I meet such men often, and that is the truth. Do you?"

This was carrying the war into the enemy's country.

"I like him very well," said Mrs. Kavanagh. "I think he is honest. I do not think he

dresses very carefully; and he is perhaps too intent on convincing you that his opinions are right."

"Well, for my part," said her daughter, with just the least tinge of warmth in her manner, "I confess I like a man who has opinions, and who is not afraid to say so. I don't find many who have. And as for his dressing, one gets rather tired of men who come to you every evening to impress you with the excellence of their tailor. As if women were to be captured by millinery! Don't we know the value of linen and woollen fabrics?"

"My dear child, you are throwing away your vexation on some one whom I don't know. It isn't Mr. Lavender?"

"Oh dear, no! He is not so silly as that: he dresses well, but there is perfect freedom about his dress. He is too much an artist to sacrifice himself to his clothes."

"I am glad you have a good word for him at last. I think you have been rather hard on him since Mr. Ingram called; and that is the reason I asked you to be careful."

She was quite careful, but as explicit as good manners would allow. Mrs. Lorraine was most particular in asking about Mrs. Lavender, and in expressing her regret that they so seldom saw her.

"She has been brought up in the country, you know," said Lavender, with a smile; "and there the daughters of a house are taught a number of domestic duties that they would consider it a sin to neglect. She would be unhappy if you caused her to neglect them; she would take her pleasure with a bad conscience."

"But she cannot be occupied with them all day."

"My dear Mrs. Lorraine, how often have we discussed the question! And you know you have me at a disadvantage; for how can I describe to you what those mysterious duties are? I only know that she is pretty nearly always busy with something or other; and in the evening, of course, she is generally too tired to think of going out anywhere."

"Oh, but you must try to get her out. Next Tuesday, now, Judge —— is going to dine with us, and you know how amusing he is. If you have no other engagements, couldn't you bring Mrs. Lavender to dine with us on that evening?"

Now, on former occasions, something of the same sort of invitation had frequently been given; and it was generally answered by Lavender's giving an excuse for his wife, and promising to come himself. What was his astonishment to find Mrs. Lorraine plainly, and most courteously,

intimating that the invitation was addressed distinctly to Mr. and Mrs. Lavender as a couple! When he regretted that Mrs. Lavender could not come, she said, quietly—

"Oh, I am so sorry! You would have met an old friend of yours here, as well as the Judge—Mr. Ingram."

Lavender made no further sign of surprise or curiosity than to lift his eyebrows, and say—

"Indeed!"

But when he left the house, certain dark suspicions were troubling his mind. Nothing had been said as to the manner in which Ingram had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter; but there was that in Mrs. Lorraine's manner which convinced Lavender that something had happened. Had Ingram carried his interference to the extent of complaining to them? Had he overcome a repugnance which he had repeatedly admitted, and thrust himself upon these two people for this very purpose of making him, Lavender, odious and contemptible? Lavender's cheeks burned as he thought of this possibility. Mrs. Lorraine had been most courteous to him; but the longer he dwelt on these vague surmises, the deeper grew his consciousness that he had been turned out of the place, morally if not physically. What

was that excess of courtesy but a cloak? If she had meant less, she would have been more careless; and all through the interview he had remarked that, instead of the free warfare of talk that generally went on between them, Mrs. Lorraine was most formally polite, and apparently watchful of her words.

He went home in a passion, which was all the more consuming that it could not be vented on anyone. As Sheila had not spoken to Ingram—as she had even nerved herself to wound him by passing him without notice in the street—she could not be held responsible; and yet he wished that he could have upbraided some one for this mischief that had been done. Should he go straight down to Ingram's lodgings, and have it out with him? At first he was strongly inclined to do so; but wiser counsels prevailed. Ingram had a keen and ready tongue; and a way of saying things that made them rankle afterwards in the memory. Besides, he would go into court with a defective case. He could say nothing, unless Ingram admitted that he had tried to poison the mind of Mrs. Lorraine against him; and, of course, if there was a quarrel, who would be so foolish as to make such an admission? Ingram would laugh at him; would refuse to admit or deny;

would increase his anger without affording him an opportunity of revenging himself.

Sheila could see that her husband was troubled, but could not divine the cause, and had long ago given up any habit of inquiry. He ate his dinner almost in silence, and then said he had to make a call on a friend, and that he would perhaps drop in to the club on his way home, so that she was not to sit up for him. She was not surprised or hurt at the announcement. She was accustomed to spend her evenings alone. She fetched down his cigar-case, put it in his top-coat pocket, and brought him the coat. Then he kissed her, and went out.

But this evening, at least, she had abundant occupation, and that of a sufficiently pleasant kind. For some little time she heen harbouring in her mind a dark and mysterious plot, and she was glad of an opportunity to think it out and arrange its details. Mairi was coming to London ; and she had carefully concealed the fact from her husband. A little surprise, of a dramatic sort, was to be prepared for him ; with what result, who could tell ? All of a sudden Lavender was to be precipitated into the island of Lewis, as nearly as that could be imitated in a house at Notting Hill.

This was Sheila's scheme, and on these lonely

evenings she could sit by herself with much satisfaction and ponder over the little points of it and its possible success. Mairi was coming to London under the escort of a worthy Glasgow fishmonger whom Mr. Mackenzie knew. She would arrive after Lavender had left for his studio. Then she and Sheila would set to work to transform the smoking-room, that was sometimes called a library, into something resembling the quaint little drawing-room in Sheila's home. Mairi was bringing up a quantity of heather gathered fresh from the rocks beside the White Water; she was bringing up some peacocks' feathers, too, for the mantelpiece, and two or three big shells; and, best of all, she was to put in her trunk a real and veritable lump of peat, well dried, and easy to light. Then you must know that Sheila had already sketched out the meal that was to be placed on the table, so soon as the room had been done up in the Highland fashion, and this peat lit, so as to send its fragrant smoke abroad. A large salmon was to make its appearance first of all. There would be bottles of beer on the table; also one of those bottles of Norwegian make, filled with whisky. And when Lavender went with wonder into this small room, when he smelt the fragrant peat-smoke—and everyone knows how

powerful the sense of smell is in recalling bygone associations—when he saw the smoking salmon, and the bottled beer and the whisky—and when he suddenly found Mairi coming into the room, and saying to him, in her sweet Highland fashion, "And are you ferry well, sir?"—would not his heart warm to the old ways and kindly homeliness of the house in Borva, and would not some glimpse of the happy and half-forgotten time that was now so sadly and strangely remote, cause him to break down that barrier between himself and Sheila that this artificial life in the South had placed there?

So the child dreamed; and was happy in dreaming of it. Sometimes she grew afraid of her project; she had not had much experience in deception, and the mere concealment of Mairi's coming was a hard thing to bear. But surely her husband would take this trick in good part. It was only, after all, a joke. To put a little barbaric splendour of decoration into the quiet little smoking-room; to have a scent of peat-smoke in the air; and to have a timid, sweet-voiced, pretty Highland girl suddenly make her appearance, with an odour of the sea about her, as it were, and a look of fresh breezes in the colour of her cheeks—what mortal man could find fault with this innocent jest?

Sheila's moments of doubt were succeeded by long hours of joyous confidence, in which a happy light shone on her face. She went through the house with a brisk step; she sang to herself as she went; she was kinder than ever to the small children who came into the Square every forenoon, and whose acquaintance she had very speedily made; she gave each of her crossing-sweepers threepence instead of twopence in passing. The servants had never seen her in such good spirits; she was exceptionally generous in presenting them with articles of attire; they might have had half the week in holidays if Mr. Lavender had not to be attended to. A small gentleman of three years of age lived next door, and his acquaintance also she had made, by means of his nurse. At this time his stock of toys, which Sheila had kept carefully renewed, became so big, that he might, with proper management, have set up a stall in the Lowther Arcade.

Just before she left Lewis, her father had called her to him, and said—

"Sheila, I wass wanting to tell you about something. It is not everyone that will care to hef his money given away to poor folk, and it wass many a time I said to myself that when you were married maybe your husband would

think you were giving too much money to the poor folk, as you wass doing in Borva. And it iss this fifty pounds I hef got for you, Sheila, in ten bank-notes, and you will take them with you for your own money, that you will not hef any trouble about giving things to people. And when the fifty pounds will be done, I will send you another fifty pounds, and it will be no difference to me whatever. And if there is any one in Borva you would be for sending money to, there is your own money; for there is many a one would take the money from Sheila Mackenzie that would not be for taking it from an English stranger in London. And when you will send it to them, you will send it to me; and I will tek it to them, and I will tell them that this money is from my Sheila, and from no one else whatever."

This was all the dowry that Sheila carried with her to the South. Mackenzie would willingly have given her half his money, if she would have taken it, or if her husband had desired it; but the old king of Borva had profound and far-reaching schemes in his head about the small fortune he might otherwise have accorded to his daughter. This wealth, such as it was, was to be a magnet to draw this young English gentleman back to the

Hebrides. It was all very well for Mr. Lavender to have plenty of money at present; he might not always have it. Then the time would come for Mackenzie to say, "Look here, young man; I can support myself easily and comfortably by my farming and fishing. The money I have saved is at your disposal, so long as you consent to remain in Lewis—in Stornoway, if you please, —elsewhere if you please—only in Lewis. And while you are painting pictures, and making as much money as you can that way, you can have plenty of fishing, and shooting, and amusement: and my guns and boats and rods are all at your service." Mr. Mackenzie considered that no man could resist such an offer.

Sheila, of course, told her husband of the sum of money she owned; and for a long time it was a standing joke between them. He addressed her with much respect, and was careful to inform her of the fluctuations of the money-market. Sometimes he borrowed a sovereign of her; and never without giving her an I O U, which was faithfully reclaimed. But by and by she perceived that he grew less and less to like the mention of this money. Perhaps it resembled too closely the savings which the over-cautious folks about Borvabost would not entrust to a bank, but kept hidden

about their huts in the heel of a stocking. At all events, Sheila saw that her husband did not like her to go to this fund for her charities; and so the fifty pounds that her father had given her lasted a long time. During this period of jubilation, in which she looked forward to touching her husband's heart by an innocent little stratagem, more frequent appeals were made to the drawer in which the treasure was locked up, so that in the end her private dowry was reduced to thirty pounds.

If Ingram could have but taken part in this plan of hers! The only regret that was mingled with her anticipations of a happier future concerned this faithful friend of hers, who seemed to have been cut off from them for ever. And it soon became apparent to her that her husband, so far from inclining to forget the misunderstanding that had arisen between Ingram and himself, seemed to feel increased resentment, insomuch that she was most careful to avoid mentioning his name.

She was soon to meet him, however. Lavender was resolved that he would not appear to have retired from the field, merely because Ingram had entered it. He would go to this dinner on the Tuesday evening, and Sheila would accompany him. First he asked her.

Much as she would have preferred not visiting these particular people, she cheerfully acquiesced; she was not going to be churlish or inconsiderate on the very eve of her dramatic *coup*. Then he went to Mrs. Lorraine, and said he had persuaded Sheila to come with them; and the young American lady and her mamma were good enough to say how glad they were she had come to this decision. They appeared to take it for granted that it was Sheila alone who had declined former invitations.

"Mr. Ingram will be there on Tuesday evening," said Lavender to his wife.

"I was not aware he knew them," said Sheila, remembering, indeed, how scrupulously Ingram had refused to know them.

"He has made their acquaintance for his own purposes, doubtless," said Lavender. "I suppose he will appear in a frock-coat, with a bright blue tie, and he will say 'Sir' to the waiters when he does not understand them."

"I thought you said Mr. Ingram belonged to a very good family," said Sheila, quietly.

"That is so. But each man is responsible for his own manners; and as all the society he sees consists of a cat and some wooden pipes, in a couple of dingy rooms in Sloane Street, you can't expect him not to make an ass of himself."

"I have never seen him make himself ridiculous: I do not think it possible," said Sheila, with a certain precision of speech which Lavender had got to know meant much. "But that is a matter for himself. Perhaps you will tell me what I am to do when I meet him at Mrs. Kavanagh's house."

"Of course, you must meet him as you would anyone else you know. If you don't wish to speak to him, you need not do so. Saying 'Good evening' costs nothing."

"If he takes me in to dinner?" she asked, calmly.

"Then you must talk to him as you would to any stranger," he said, impatiently. "Ask him if he has been to the opera, and he won't know there is no opera going on. Tell him that town is very full, and he won't know that everybody has left. Say you may meet him again at Mrs. Kavanagh's, and you'll see that he doesn't know they mean to start for the Tyrol in a fortnight. I think you and I must also be settling soon where we mean to go. I don't think we could do better than go to the Tyrol."

She did not answer. It was clear that he had given up all intention of going up to Lewis, for that year at least. But she would not beg him to alter his decision just yet. Mairi was

coming; and that experiment of the enchanted room had still to be tried.

As they drove round to Mrs. Kavanagh's house on that Tuesday evening, she thought, with much bitterness of heart, of the possibility of her having to meet Mr. Ingram in the fashion her husband had suggested. Would it not be better, if he did take her in to dinner, to throw herself entirely on his mercy, and ask him not to talk to her at all? She would address herself when there was a chance, to her neighbour on the other side: if she remained silent altogether, no great harm would be done.

When she went into the drawing-room, her first glance round was for him, and he was the first person whom she saw. For, instead of withdrawing into a corner to make one neighbour the victim of his shyness, or concealing his embarrassment in studying the photographic albums, Mr. Ingram was coolly standing on the hearthrug, with both hands in his trousers' pockets, while he was engaged in giving the American Judge a great deal of authoritative information about America. The Judge was a tall, fair, stout, good-natured man, fond of joking and a good dinner; and he was content at this moment to sit quietly in an easy-chair, with a pleasant smile on his face, and be

lectured about his own country by this sallow little man, whom he took to be a Professor of Modern History at some University or other.

Ingram, as soon as he found that Sheila was in the room, relieved her from any doubt as to his intentions. He merely came forward, shook hands with her, said, "How do you do, Mrs. Lavender?" and went back to the Judge. She might have been an acquaintance of yesterday, or a friend of twenty years' standing: no one could tell by his manner. As for Sheila, she parted with his hand reluctantly. She tried to look, too, what she dared not say; but whatever of regret, and kindness, and assurance of friendship was in her eyes, he did not see. He scarcely glanced at her face; he went off at once, and plunged again into the Cincinnati Convention.

Mrs. Kavanagh and Mrs. Lorraine were exceedingly and almost obtrusively kind to her; but she scarcely heard what they said to her. It seemed so strange and so sad to her that her old friend should be standing near her, and she so far removed from him that she dared not go and speak to him. She could not understand it sometimes—everything around her seemed to get confused, until she felt as if she were sinking in a great sea, and could utter but one despairing cry as she saw the

light disappear above her head. When they went in to dinner, she saw that Mr. Ingram's seat was on Mrs. Lorraine's right hand; and although she could hear him speak, as he was almost right opposite to her, it seemed to her that his voice sounded as if it were far away. The man who had taken her in was a tall, brown-whiskered, and faultlessly-dressed person who never spoke; so that she was allowed to sit and listen to the conversation between Mrs. Lorraine and Ingram. They appeared to be on excellent terms. You would have fancied they had known each other for years. And as Sheila sat and saw how pre-occupied and pleased with his companion Mr. Ingram was, perhaps now and again the bitter question arose to her mind, whether this woman, who had taken away her husband, was seeking to take away her friend also. Sheila knew nothing of all that had happened within these past few days. She knew only that she was alone—without either husband or friend; and it seemed to her that this pale American girl had taken both away from her.

Ingram was in one of his happiest moods, and was seeking to prove to Mrs. Lorraine that this present dinner-party ought to be an especially pleasant one. Everybody was going

away somewhere; and, of course, she must know that the expectation of travelling was much more delightful than the reality of it. What could surpass the sense of freedom, of power, of hope enjoyed by the happy folks who sat down to an open atlas, and began to sketch out routes for their coming holidays? Where was he going? Oh, he was going to the North. Had Mrs. Lorraine never seen Edinburgh Castle rising out of a grey fog, like the ghost of some great building belonging to the times of Arthurian romance? Had she never seen the northern twilights, and the awful gloom and wild colours of Loch Coruisk and the Skye hills? There was no holiday-making so healthy, so free from restraint, as that among the far Highland hills and glens, where the clear mountain air, scented with miles and miles of heather, seemed to produce a sort of intoxication of good spirits within one. Then the yachting round the wonderful islands of the West—the rapid runs of a bright forenoon, the shooting of the wild sea-birds, the scrambled dinners in the small cabin, the still nights in the small harbours, with a scent of sea-weed abroad, and the white stars shining down on the trembling water. Yes, he was going yachting this autumn—in about a fortnight he hoped to start. His friend

was at present away up Loch Boisdale, in South Uist, and he did not know how to get there except by going to Skye, and taking his chance of some boat going over. Where would they go then? He did not know. Wherever his friend liked. It would be enough for him if they kept moving about, seeing the strange sights of the sea, and the air, and the lonely shores of those northern islands. Perhaps they might even try to reach St. Kilda——

"Oh, Mr. Ingram, won't you go and see my papa!"

The cry that suddenly reached him was like the cry of a broken heart. He started as from a trance, and found Sheila regarding him with a piteous appeal in her face; she had been listening intently to all he had said.

"Oh yes, Sheila," he said, kindly, and quite forgetting that he was speaking to her before strangers; "of course I must go and see your papa, if we are any way near the Lewis. Perhaps you may be there then?"

"No," said Sheila, looking down.

"Won't you go to the Highlands this autumn?" Mrs. Lorraine asked, in a friendly way.

"No," said Sheila, in a measured voice, as she looked her enemy fair in the face; "I think we are going to the Tyrol."

If the child had only known what occurred to Mrs. Lorraine's mind at this moment! Not a triumphant sense of Lavender's infatuation, as Sheila probably fancied; but a very definite resolution that, if Frank Lavender went to the Tyrol, it was not with either her or her mother he should go.

"Mrs. Lavender's father is an old friend of mine," said Ingram, loud enough for all to hear; "and hospitable as all Highlanders are, I have never met his equal in that way, and I have tried his patience a good many times. What do you think, Mrs. Lorraine, of a man who would give up his best gun to you, even though you couldn't shoot a bit, and he particularly proud of his shooting? And so, if you lived with him for a month or six months—each day the best of everything for you, the second-best for your friend, the worst for himself. Wasn't it so, Lavender?"

It was a direct challenge sent across the table; and Sheila's heart beat quick lest her husband should say something ungracious.

"Yes, certainly," said Lavender, with a readiness that pleased Sheila; "I at least have no right to complain of his hospitality."

"Your papa is a very handsome man," said Mrs. Lorraine to Sheila, bringing the con-

versation back to their own end of the table "I have seen few finer heads than that drawing you have. Mr. Lavender did that, did he not? Why has he never done one of you?"

"He is too busy, I think, just now," Sheila said; perhaps not knowing that from Mrs. Lorraine's waist-belt at that moment depended a fan which might have given evidence as to the extreme scarcity of time under which Lavender was supposed to labour.

"He has a splendid head," said Ingram. "Did you know that he is called the King of Borva up there?"

"I have heard him being called the King of Thule," said Mrs. Lorraine, turning with a smile to Sheila, "and of his daughter being styled a Princess. Do you know the ballad of the King of Thule in 'Faust,' Mrs. Lavender?"

"In the opera?—yes," said Sheila.

"Will you sing it for us after dinner?"

"If you like."

The promise was fulfilled, in a fashion. The notion that Mr. Ingram was about to go away up to Lewis, to the people who knew her, and to her father's house, with no possible answer to the questions which would certainly be showered upon him as to why she had not come also, troubled Sheila deeply. The ladies went into

the drawing-room, and Mrs. Lorraine got out the song. Sheila sat down to the piano, thinking far more of that small stone house at Borva than of the King of Thule's castle overlooking the sea; and yet somehow the first lines of the song, though she knew them well enough, sent a pang to her heart as she glanced at them. She touched the first notes of the accompaniment, and she looked at the words again.

> "*Over the sea in Thulè of old*
> *Reigned a King who was true hearted,*
> *Who in remembrance of one departed—*"

A mist came over her eyes. Was she the one who had departed, leaving the old King in his desolate house by the sea, where he could only think of her as he sat in his solitary chamber, with the night winds howling round the shore outside? When her birthday had come round, she knew that he must have silently drunk to her, though not out of a beaker of gold. And now, when mere friends and acquaintances were free to speed away to the North, and get a welcome from the folks in Borva, and listen to the Atlantic waves dashing lightly in among the rocks, her hope of getting thither had almost died out. Among such people as landed on Stornoway quay from the big *Clansman*, her

father would seek one face, and seek it in vain. And Duncan, and Scarlett, and even John the Piper—all the well-remembered folks who lived far away across the Minch—they woud ask why Miss Sheila was never coming back. Mrs. Lorraine had been standing aside from the piano. Noticing that Sheila had played the introduction to the song twice over, in an undetermined manner, she came forward a step or two, and pretended to be looking at the music. Tears were running down Sheila's face. Mrs. Lorraine put her hand on the girl's shoulder, and sheltered her from observation, and said aloud—

"You have it in a different key, have you not? Pray don't sing it. Sing something else. Do you know any of Gounod's sacred songs? Let me see if we can find anything for you in this volume."

They were a long time finding anything in that volume. When they did find it, behold! it was one of Mrs. Lorraine's songs, and that young lady said, if Mrs. Lavender would only allow herself to be superseded for a few minutes ——And so Sheila walked, with her head down, to the conservatory, which was at the other end of the piano; and Mrs. Lorraine not only sung this French song, but sang every

one of the verses; and at the end of it she had quite forgotten that Sheila had promised to sing.

"You are very sensitive," she said to Sheila, coming into the conservatory.

"I am very stupid," Sheila said, with her face burning. "But it is a long time since I will see the Highlands—and Mr. Ingram was talking of the places I know—and—and so——"

"I understand well enough," said Mrs. Lorraine, tenderly, as if Sheila were a mere child in her hands. "But you must not get your eyes red. You have to sing some of those Highland songs for us yet, when the gentlemen come in. Come up to my room, and I will make your eyes all right. Oh, do not be afraid! I shall not bring you down like Lady Leveret. Did you ever see anything like that woman's face to-night? It reminds me of the window of an oil-and-colour shop: I wonder she does not catch flies with her cheeks."

So all the people, Sheila learned that night, were going away from London; and soon she and her husband would join in the general stampede of the very last dwellers in town. But Mairi? What was to become of her after that little plot had been played out? Sheila could not leave Mairi to see London by herself;

she had been enjoying beforehand the delight of taking the young girl about, and watching the wonder of her eyes. Nor could she fairly postpone Mairi's visit; and Mairi was coming up in another couple of days.

On the morning on which the visitor from the far Hebrides was to make her appearance in London, Sheila felt conscious of a great hypocrisy in bidding good-bye to her husband. On some excuse or other, she had had breakfast ordered early; and he found himself ready at half-past nine to go out for the day.

"Frank," she said, "will you come in to lunch at two?"

"Why?" he asked: he did not often have luncheon at home.

"I will go into the Park with you in the afternoon, if you like," she said: all the scene had been diligently rehearsed, on one side, before.

Lavender was a little surprised, but he was in an amiable mood.

"All right," he said. "Have something with olives in it. Two sharp."

With that he went out; and Sheila, with a wild commotion at her heart, saw him walk away through the Square. She was afraid Mairi might have arrived before he left. And,

indeed, he had not gone above a few minutes when a four-wheeler drove up, and an elderly man got out and waited for the timid-faced girl inside to alight. With a rush like that of a startled deer, Sheila was down the stairs, along the hall, and on the pavement; and it was, "Oh, Mairi! and have you come at last? And are you very well? And how are all the people in Borva? And, Mr. M'Alpine, how are you, and will you come into the house?"

Certainly, that was a strange sight for a decorous London square; the mistress of a house, a young girl with bare head, coming out on the pavement to shake hands in a frantic fashion with a young maid-servant and an elderly man whose clothes had been pretty well tanned by sunlight and sea-water. And Sheila would herself help to carry Mairi's luggage in. And she would take no denial from Mr. M'Alpine, whose luggage was also carried in. And she would herself pay the cabman, as strangers did not know about these things: Sheila's knowledge being exhibited by her hastily giving the man five shillings for driving from Euston Station. And there was breakfast waiting for them both, as soon as Mairi could get her face washed; and would Mr. M'Alpine have a glass of whisky after the night's travelling?—and it was very good

whisky whatever, as it had come all the way from Stornoway. Mr. M'Alpine was nothing loth.

"And wass you pretty well, Miss Sheila?" said Mairi, looking timidly and hastily up, and forgetting altogether that Sheila had another name now. "It will be a great thing for me to go back to sa Lewis, and tell them I wass seeing you, and you wass looking so well. And I will be thinking I wass neffer coming to anyone I knew any more! and it is a great fright I hef had since we came away from sa Lewis; and I wass thinking we would neffer find you among all sa people and so far away across sa sea and sa land. Eh——!" The girl stopped in astonishment. Her eyes had wandered up to a portrait on the walls; and here, in this very room, after she had travelled over all this great distance, apparently leaving behind her everything but the memory of her home, was Mr. Mackenzie himself, looking at her from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"You must have seen that picture in Borva, Mairi," Sheila said. "Now come with me, like a good girl, and get yourself ready for breakfast. Do you know, Mairi, it does my heart good to hear you talk again. I don't think I shall be able to let you go back to the Lewis."

"But you hef changed ferry much in your way of speaking, Miss—Mrs. Lavender," said Mairi, with an effort. "You will speak just like sa English now."

"The English don't say so," replied Sheila, with a smile, leading the way upstairs.

Mr. M'Alpine had his business to attend to; but, being a sensible man, he took advantage of the profuse breakfast placed before him. Mairi was a little too frightened, and nervous, and happy to eat much; but Mr. M'Alpine was an old traveller, not to be put out by the mere meeting of two girls. He listened in a grave and complacent manner to the rapid questions and answers of Mairi and her hostess; but he himself was too busy to join in the conversation much. At the end of breakfast, he accepted, after a little pressing, half a glass of whisky; and then, much comforted and in a thoroughly good humour with himself and the world, got his luggage out again and went on his way towards a certain inn in High Holborn.

"Ay, and where does the Queen live, Miss Sheila?" said Mairi. She had been looking at the furniture in Sheila's house, and wondering if the Queen lived in a place still more beautiful than this.

"A long way from here."

"And it iss no wonder," said Mairi, "she will neffer hef been in sa Lewis. I wass neffer thinking the world wass so big, and it wass many a time since me and Mr. M'Alpine hef come away from Styornoway, I wass thinking it wass too far for me effer to get back again. But it is many a one will say to me, before I hef left the Lewis, that I wass not to come home unless you wass coming too, and I wass to bring you back with me, Miss Sheila. And where is Bras, Miss Sheila?"

"You will see him by and by. He is out in the garden now." She said 'gyarden' without knowing it.

"And will he understood the Gaelic yet?"

"Oh yes," Sheila said, "and he is sure to remember you."

There was no mistake about that. When Mairi went into the back-garden, the demonstrations of delight on the part of the great deerhound were as pronounced as his dignity and gravity would allow. And Mairi fairly fell upon his neck and kissed him, and addressed to him a hundred endearing phrases in Gaelic, every word of which it was quite obvious that the dog understood. London was already beginning to be less terrible to her. She had met and talked with Sheila. Here was Bras.

A portrait of the King of Borva was hung up inside, and all round the rooms were articles which she had known in the North, before Sheila had married and brought them away into this strange land.

"You have never asked after my husband, Mairi," said Sheila, thinking she would confuse the girl.

But Mairi was not confused. Probably she had been fancying that Mr. Lavender was down at the shore, or had gone out fishing, or something of that sort, and would return soon enough. It was Sheila, not he, whom she was concerned about. Indeed, Mairi had caught up a little of that jealousy of Lavender which was rife among the Borva folks. They would speak no ill of Mr. Lavender. The young gentleman whom Miss Sheila had chosen had by that very fact a claim upon their respect. Mr. Mackenzie's son-in-law was a person of importance. And yet, in their secret hearts, they bore a grudge against him. What right had he to come away up to the North and carry off the very pride of the island? Were English girls not good enough for him that he must needs come up and take away Sheila Mackenzie, and keep her there in the South so that her friends and acquaintances saw no more of her? Before the marriage,

Mairi had a great liking and admiration for Mr. Lavender. She was so pleased to see Miss Sheila pleased that she approved of the young man, and thanked him in her heart for making her cousin and mistress so obviously happy. Perhaps, indeed, Mairi managed to fall in love with him a little bit herself, merely by force of example and through sympathy with Sheila; and she was rapidly forming very good opinions of the English race, and their ways, and their looks. But when Lavender took away Sheila from Borva, a change came over Mairi's sentiments. She gradually fell in with the current opinions of the island—that it was a great pity Sheila had not married young Mr. MacIntyre, of Sutherland, or some who would have allowed her to remain among her own people. Mairi began to think that the English, though they were handsome, and good-natured, and free with their money, were on the whole a selfish race, inconsiderate, and forgetful of promises. She began to dislike the English, and wished they would stay in their own country, and not interfere with other people.

"I hope he is ferry well," said Mairi, dutifully: she could at least say that honestly.

"You will see him at two o'clock. He is coming in to luncheon; and he does not know

you are here; and you are to be a great surprise to him, Mairi. And there is to be a greater surprise still; for we are going to make one of the rooms into the drawing-room at home; and you must open your boxes, and bring me down the heather and the peat, Mairi, and the two bottles; and then, you know, when the salmon is on the table, and the whisky, and the beer, and Bras lying on the hearthrug, and the peat-smoke all through the room, then you will come in and shake hands with him, and he will think he is in Borva again."

Mairi was a little puzzled. She did not understand the intention of this strange thing. But she went and fetched the materials she had brought with her from Lewis, and Sheila and Mairi set to work.

It was a pleasant enough occupation for this bright forenoon, and Sheila, as she heard Mairi's sweet Highland speech, and as she brought from all parts of the house the curiosities sent her from the Hebrides, would almost have fancied she was superintending a "cleaning" of that museum-like little drawing-room at Borva. Skins of foxes, seals, and deer, stuffed eagles and strange fishes, masses of coral and wonderful carvings in wood brought from abroad, shells of every size from every clime—all these were

brought together into Frank Lavender's smoking-room. The ordinary ornaments of the mantelpiece gave way to fanciful arrangements of peacocks' feathers. Fresh-blown ling and the beautiful spikes of the bell-heather formed the staple of the decorations, and Mairi had brought enough to adorn an assembly-room.

"That is like the Lewis people," Sheila said, with a laugh—she had not been in as happy a mood for many a day. "I asked you to bring one peat, and of course you brought two. Tell the truth, Mairi; could you have forced yourself to bring one peat?"

"I wass thinking it was safer to bring sa two," replied Mairi, blushing all over the fair and pretty face.

And, indeed, there being two peats, Sheila thought she might as well try an experiment with one. She crumbled down some pieces, put them on a plate, lit them, and placed the plate outside the open window, on the sill. Presently a new, sweet, half-forgotten fragrance came floating in; and Sheila almost forgot the success of the experiment in the half-delighted, half-sad reminiscences called up by the scent of the peat. Mairi failed to see how anyone could wilfully smoke a house—anyone, that is to say, who did not save the smoke for his thatch. And who

was so particular as Sheila had been about having the clothes come in from the washing dried, so that they should not retain this very odour that seemed now to delight her?

At last the room was finished, and Sheila contemplated it with much satisfaction. The table was laid, and on the white cloth stood the bottles most familiar to Borva. The peat-smoke still lingered in the air; she could not have wished anything to be better.

Then she went off to look after luncheon, and Mairi was permitted to go down and explore the mysteries of the kitchen. The servants were not accustomed to this interference and oversight, and might have resented it, only that Sheila had proved a very good mistress to them, and had shown, too, that she would have her own way when she wanted it. Suddenly, as Sheila was explaining to Mairi the use of some particular piece of mechanism, she heard a sound that made her heart jump. It was now but half-past one: and yet that was surely her husband's foot in the hall. For a moment she was too bewildered to know what to do. She heard him go straight into the very room she had been decorating, the door of which she had left open. Then, as she went upstairs, with her heart still beating fast, the first thing that met her eye was a tartan

shawl belonging to Mairi that had been accidentally left in the passage. Her husband must have seen it.

"Sheila, what nonsense is this?" he said.

He was evidently in a hurry; and yet she could not answer, her heart was throbbing too quickly.

"Look here," he said, "I wish you'd give up this grotto-making till to-morrow. Mrs. Kavanagh, Mrs. Lorraine, and Lord Arthur Redmond are coming in to luncheon at two. I suppose you can get something decent for them. What is the matter? What is the meaning of all this?"

And then his eye rested on the tartan shawl, which he had really not noticed before.

"Who is in the house?" he said, "Have you asked some washerwoman to lunch?"

Sheila managed at last to say—

"It is Mairi come from Stornoway. I was thinking you would be surprised to see her when you came in——"

"And these preparations are for her!"

Sheila said nothing: there was that in the tone of her husband's voice which was gradually bringing her to herself, and giving her quite sufficient firmness.

"And now that this girl has come up, I

suppose you mean to introduce her to all your friends; and I suppose you expect those people who are coming in half an hour to sit down at table with a kitchen-maid?"

"Mairi," said Sheila, standing quite erect, but with her eyes cast down, "is my cousin."

"Your cousin! Don't be ridiculous, Sheila. You know very well that Mairi is nothing more nor less than a scullery-maid, and I suppose you mean to take her out of the kitchen, and introduce her to people, and expect them to sit down at table with them. Is not that so?"

She did not answer, and he went on, impatiently, "Why was I not told that this girl was coming to stay at my house? Surely I have some right to know what guests you invite, that I may be able at least to ask my friends not to come near the house while they are in it."

"That I did not tell you before—yes, that was a pity," said Sheila, sadly and calmly. "But it will be no trouble to you. When Mrs. Lorraine comes up at two o'clock, there will be luncheon for her and for her friends. She will not have to sit down with any of my relations, or with me, for if they are not fit to meet her, I am not; and it is not any great matter that I shall not meet her at two o'clock."

There was no passion of any sort in the

measured and sad voice, nor in the somewhat pale face and downcast eyes. Perhaps it was this composure that deceived Frank Lavender; at all events, he turned and walked out of the house, satisfied that he would not have to introduce this Highland cousin to his friends, and just as certain that Sheila would repent of her resolve, and appear in the dining-room as usual.

Sheila went downstairs to the kitchen, where Mairi still stood awaiting her. She gave orders to one of the servants about having luncheon laid in the dining-room at two, and then she bade Mairi follow her upstairs.

"Mairi," she said, when they were alone, "I want you to put your things in your trunk at once—in five minutes if you can—I shall be waiting for you."

"Miss Sheila!" cried the girl, looking up to her friend's face with a sudden fright seizing her heart. "What is the matter with you? You are going to die!"

"There is nothing the matter, Mairi. I am going away."

She uttered the words placidly; but there was a pained look about the lips that could not be concealed, and her face, unknown to herself, had the whiteness of despair in it.

"Going away!" said Mairi, in a bewildered way. "Where are you going, Miss Sheila?"

"I will tell you by and by. Get your trunk ready, Mairi. You are keeping me waiting."

Then she called for a servant, who was sent for a cab; and by the time the vehicle appeared, Mairi was ready to get into it, and her trunk was put on the top. Then, clad in the rough blue dress that she used to wear in Borva, and with no appearance of haste or fear in the calm and death-like face, Sheila came out from her husband's house, and found herself alone in the world. There were two little girls, the daughters of a neighbour, passing by at the time; she patted them on the head, and bade them good-morning. Could she recollect, five minutes thereafter, having seen them? There was a strange and distant look in her eyes. She got into the cab, and sat down by Mairi, and then took the girl's hand.

"I am sorry to take you away, Mairi," she said; but she was apparently not thinking of Mairi, nor of the house she was leaving, nor yet of the vehicle in which she was so strangely placed. Was she thinking of a certain wild and wet day in the far Hebrides, when a young bride stood on the decks of a great vessel, and saw the home of her childhood and the friends

of her youth fade back into the desolate waste of the sea? Perhaps there may have been some unconscious influence in this picture to direct her movements at this moment, for of definite resolves she had none. When Mairi told her that the cabman wanted to know whither he was to drive, she merely answered, "Oh yes, Mairi, we will go to the station;" and Mairi added, addressing the man, "It was the Euston Station." Then they drove away.

"Are you going home?" said the young girl, looking up with a strange foreboding and sinking of the heart to the pale face and distant eyes. "Are you going home, Miss Sheila?"

"Oh yes, we are going home, Mairi," was the answer she got; but the tone in which it was uttered filled her mind with doubt and something like despair.

END OF VOL. II.

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